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COLLECTOR'S ISSUE: 2021 PWI TAG TEAM SPECIAL

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

WHICH TEAM WILL
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OUR 1ST EVER
TAG TEAM 50
RANKING



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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Airplane spin | 21. Face rake | 41. Leg lock |
| 2. Arm drag | 22. Fireman's carry ram | 42. Leg sweep |
| 3. Arm lock | 23. Flying body press | 43. Manager interference |
| 4. Asian spike | 24. Flying clothesline | 44. Monkey flip |
| 5. Atomic drop | 25. Flying drop kick | 45. Overhead toss |
| 6. Bear hug | 26. Flying elbow drop | 46. Pole ram |
| 7. Bite | 27. Flying head butt | 47. Reverse chin lock |
| 8. Body slam | 28. Flying mare | 48. Rolling scissors |
| 9. Body tackle | 29. Forearm smash | 49. Rope burn |
| 10. Bulldog | 30. Foreign object | 50. Russian sickle |
| 11. Chicken wing | 31. Full nelson | 51. Savate kick |
| 12. Choke slam | 32. Giant swing | 52. Scissors grip |
| 13. Claw | 33. Grapevine | 53. Shoulder breaker |
| 14. Clothesline | 34. Hair pull | 54. Slingshot |
| 15. Cross body block | 35. Hammer lock | 55. Snap mare |
| 16. Double axehandle | 36. Head lock | 56. Step-over toe hold |
| 17. Drop kick | 37. Head stomp | 57. Suplex |
| 18. Eagle split | 38. Hip roll | 58. Surfboard |
| 19. Elbow smash | 39. Irish whip | 59. Turnbuckle smash |
| 20. Eye gouge | 40. Knee drop | 60. Wrist lock |

SET-UP HOLDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 61. Abdominal stretch | 71. Cradle | 81. Power bomb |
| 62. Avalanche | 72. Crucifix | 82. Power slam |
| 63. Backbreaker | 73. DDT | 83. Scorpion deathlock |
| 64. Backroll press | 74. Figure four | 84. Sleeper |
| 65. Belly to belly | 75. Flying leg drop | 85. Slingshot suplex |
| 66. Big splash | 76. Gourd buster | 86. Spine buster |
| 67. Boston crab | 77. Hurricanrana | 87. Stunner |
| 68. Brain buster | 78. Moonsault | 88. Sunset flip |
| 69. Camel clutch | 79. Neckbreaker | 89. Superplex |
| 70. Cobra clutch | 80. Piledriver | 90. Texas cloverleaf |

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WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

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1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.

FROM the DESK OF...

WE'RE NOT PRIVY to the ages of all our readers. But I think it's safe to assume that, at 36 years old, I'm pretty close to being the median age among wrestling fans. Those who enjoy the sport—and who read our magazine—range from the very young to the much less young. If you plotted those ages out on a graph, somewhere in the middle you'd have folks of my generation.

While it's no secret that I enjoy the new and exciting things happening in the industry today, my decades of wrestling fandom have imbued me with a healthy appreciation for the past. One area where I am decidedly “old school” is the art of tag team wrestling.

I grew up on The Rockers, The Legion of Doom, and The Steiner Brothers. Years later, I was thrilled by The Dudley Boyz, The Hardy Boyz, and other dedicated teams without “Boyz” in the name. At the risk of sounding like an old crank, I'm not a fan of throwing together two singles stars who are temporarily lost in the shuffle, changing very little about their presentation, and then letting them run roughshod over established tandems. To paraphrase the great American philosopher Homer Simpson, I like my beer cold, my TV loud, and my tag teams similarly attired!

This might sound superficial, but, to me, it's not. Having complementary ring gear is just one signal that a promotion is serious about presenting a tag team as one cohesive unit. It should, ideally, be followed by them actually working together—from entering to a single theme song to capably executing tag team moves. And, yes, they should also have a team name that isn't just their respective names mashed together.

It follows that these duos—so devoted to their collective success that they'll forgo their individual identity to some degree—will become tag specialists. These teams should be able to defeat any Frankenstein tag team cobbled together from wrestlers who aren't doing much else. And, in all but the rarest of cases, these teams should *never* lose a 2-on-1 bout to a singles wrestler. After all, what is the point of having a tag team championship if it's only held by the mediocre? Why would fans care? Why should the *wrestlers* care?

To be sure, there are some pairings in our first-ever “Tag Team 50” who don't meet my narrow, though arguably reasonable criteria. It's also true that some other teams were cobbled together at first, only to become truly great later on. We need look no further than our top-ranked team, FTR (whose elder member, coincidentally, is the same age as me). Packaged together as The Mechanics in NXT, the duo struggled until they found success as The Revival. No less a tag team attraction than The Young Bucks saw their matches and pegged them early on as their ideal opponents.

Dax Harwood and Cash Wheeler have a remarkable chemistry that simply can't be forced. They also have an old school style that somehow makes them the perfect “dance partners” for just about any babyface team. Harwood recently tweeted that he didn't expect FTR to top our “Tag Team 50” list . . . noting that he didn't believe *PWI* even liked the duo. That is absolutely not true. In fact, I wish more teams would follow FTR's lead.

I'll close by saying that, despite some questionable booking choices concerning tag teams in major promotions, there are still dozens of fantastic tandems doing their thing today—so many, in fact, that quite a few worthy pairs didn't rank this year. Maybe tag team wrestling will blossom even further in 2021, leaving us with little choice but to expand the list.

Here's hoping.

Kevin McElvaney
Editor-in-Chief

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• FEBRUARY 2021 • 3



TEAM SEA STARS

Sisters Ashley Vox and Delmi Exo pose with the SHIMMER tag team championship belts, which they defended successfully twice during The Collective's weekend events in October.

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COVER DESIGN: LAURA BRUBAKER

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The only team to have held world tag titles in both WWE and AEW, FTR rose above the rest to be named our first-ever #1 tag team. In this exclusive Hotseat interview, Senior Writer Harry Burkett speaks to Dax Harwood and Cash Wheeler about their career thus far, prospects of reuniting the Four Horsemen, and much more.
- 26 THE FIRST-EVER PWI/TAG TEAM 50**
After more than a decade ranking the top heavy-weight and women's wrestlers in the world, we're completing the trilogy with the first annual "Tag Team 50"—complete with photos, bios, and reflections from top tag specialists.
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Though they've fared well apart, it felt like fate when Motor City Machine Guns reunited in Impact Wrestling. Scott Fishman talks to Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin about their current, celebrated run as a duo.
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Straight from the *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* vault, this 1992 feature cites a "computer program" as evidence the Steiners are the world's top tag team. Bob Smith's original text is paired with all-new classic photos for a nostalgic treat.
- 60 SIBLING REVELRY**
In a year full of depressing news stories, the success of Team Sea Stars is truly something to celebrate. Jake Joyce talks to real-life sisters Ashley Vox and Delmi Exo about their path to success ... and goals for the future.
- 66 THE ULTIMATE TEAM PLAYER**
Already one of the company's most decorated tag champs, Rocky Romero has become New Japan's multilingual jack-of-all-trades. Walter Yeates goes behind the scenes with the NJPW star.

REACHING YOU ...

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FTR, KENNY OMEGA & ADAM PAGE, LUCHA BROS. – PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUIZ/AEW

THE NORTH – PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

BEFORE the BELL

COMPILED BY MIKE BESSLER

REVIEWS

LIO RUSH: THE FINAL MATCH

A particularly creative lot by nature, many professional wrestlers aren't content to confine their artistry to the squared circle, frequently seeking daring new outlets of self-expression. Lio Rush is one such grappler, determined to show that he's as dangerous on the mic as he is in the ring. Earlier this year, Rush released a new rap album entitled *The Final Match*.

Rush's second full-length studio album kicks off with the track "Gorilla," in which he introduces CZW ring announcer Larry Legend into the fray. While that particular cut and the subsequent tune "Entrance" (featuring Nick Brodeur) provide Rush the opportunity to hype his in-ring prowess, his bravado is tempered through the smoldering key track "Ring the Bell," in which he references the struggles he has endured through a dogged pursuit of success (Lately I've been having wild thoughts/Lately I've been thinking bad things/More money, more problems/That's what the cash brings).

"Hope Spot" presents some of this album's most out-of-the box lyricism, depicting Rush's rise on the



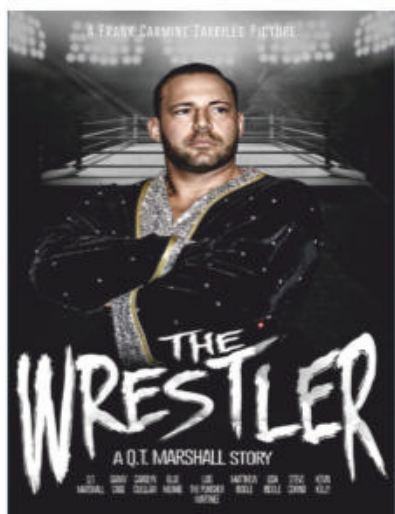
wave to stardom as a dust-up with mythical god of the sea Poseidon. There's also a flavor of *avant garde* in the musical pastiche of the short track "Rest Hold." But it's "Shine," featuring Josiah Williams and Th3 SAGA, that is the brightest jewel in this particular crown. Powerful in his performance, Rush convincingly asserts that he is in full control of his own destiny. The final track, "Thank You," includes vocals by Sarah Lai Wah and offers a poignant coda to this intense endeavor.

Available for streaming and digital download, *The Final Match* brings the best facets of Lio Rush's talents as a storyteller into a musical product that combines the grit and attitude of '90s rap with the sparkle and shine of present-day production. It's sure to appeal to wrestling fans, but it's also a safe bet that Rush will easily win new fans with this project. We give *The Final Match* four and a half out of five suplexes.



THE WRESTLER: A Q.T. MARSHALL STORY

Prior to his current stint in AEW, Q.T. Marshall was widely regarded as one of the best indie packages to never make it to the proverbial "big time." This documentary offers an inspiring—and sometimes uncomfortable—deep dive into his personal and professional existence, from his nine-to-five subsistence in the auto parts business to his extensive work as an in-ring talent and a trainer at New Jersey's Monster Factory. Highlights include footage from Marshall's 2019 NXT tryout and appearances by Gerald Brisco and Kevin Owens. **Three and a half out of five suplexes.**



WARHAUSEN: THE OFFICIAL COMIC



The fate of nations rests on the shoulders of two of indie wrestling's quirkiest stars in this original comic book by creator Jason Doran. Fan favorites Danhausen and WARHORSE take on the villainous Mr. Impressive in a saga that combines action, mysticism, and super-powered shenanigans. Replete with the idiosyncrasies that have earned the duo a veritable cult-like status, *Warhausen* propels its stars to mythical levels of ridiculousness. Allie Kat and Dan The Dad also make appearances in this incredibly entertaining and irreverent tome. **Four out of five suplexes.**

TALKIN' TRASH

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related items you've been talking about lately and our gut reaction to each:

10. WWE breaks up The New Day.

Although the split was amicable at first, things turned ugly when Big E filed for permanent custody of Xavier's slide trombone.

9. Matt Hardy announces that he is medically cleared to return to action.

As his doctor has suggested that he reduce unnecessary stress, Hardy has stopped reading the comments sections on wrestling news sites.

8. WWE re-signs CM Punk's former wrestling trainer, Ace Steel.

Asked if WWE would consider hiring CM Punk's former UFC trainers as well, Triple H indicated that the Performance Center has no current openings for concession vendors.

7. John Cena is cast as The Peacemaker in a number of DC Universe projects.

Not to be outdone by their competitors, Marvel Entertainment subsequently cast AEW star Marko Stunt as Baby Groot in the next *Guardians of the Galaxy* film.

6. Lana gets put through a table four times in four weeks.

If her title shot against Asuka doesn't work out, at least she has a promising future in quality control for IKEA's kitchen furniture division.

5. WWE files new trademarks for American and European stars.

After learning the building blocks of human life were present in the atmosphere of Venus, WWE also petitioned for rights to the term "Single-Celled Organism Slam."

4. Kurt Angle proclaims John Cena as the "G.O.A.T" of WWE.

Although the comment was initially interpreted as high praise, Angle later asserted that Cena eats hay, headbutts everyone he doesn't like, and has rectangular pupils.

3. Drew McIntyre beats Randy Orton in their Ambulance Match at Clash of Champions.

In a sure sign that WWE is cutting back on costs, the "ambulance" was actually a white Kia Forte with a red Solo cup taped to the roof.

2. Taya Valkyrie suffers second-degree burns due to allegedly defective candles that were sent to her to promote via social media.

In 2020, being a social media influencer may be a more dangerous occupation than the one in which people jump off ring posts and hit each other with steel chairs.

1. Roman Reigns defeats Jey Uso to retain the WWE Universal championship.

Reigns explained that his cousin was long overdue for a severe thrashing after time that Uso took the last Capri Sun at a family picnic back in 1992.



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WE HEARD THAT!

"I'm probably less of a wrestler than I am an executive. I really like leading people. I really like mentoring and collaboration, especially when you have really talented people who just might need a second opinion or just might need some nudging. Or if you have developmental people—and we only have a handful of those—but gosh, it's so cool to see somebody's success. I root for everybody."

— **CODY RHODES**, discussing his view of his role in AEW, from an interview with Canada's *The Sports Network*

"The Roman Reigns that you see today could not have been presented even a year ago. He was still too young a year ago. But now that Roman Reigns, both on camera and behind the scenes, has the experience, has weathered all the storms on camera and behind the scenes . . . now Roman Reigns is ready."

— **PAUL HEYMAN** to *Graham Matthews of Bleacher Report*, on the new ascendancy of Roman Reigns

"I've never lost my passion in AEW. I did in WWE a couple of times, and that's when working with Kevin Owens, Seth Rollins, Sami Zayn, Roman Reigns, and Cesaro and those types of guys helped reignite the passion."

— **CHRIS JERICHO**, commenting on his latter run in WWE, from an interview with *Yahoo! Sports*

ONE TO WATCH: PRETTY PROPER

From Uncle Elmer and Joyce to Macho Man and Miss Elizabeth, there's something about a compelling romance that captures the hearts and imaginations of pro wrestling fans. For the duo Pretty Proper, the story didn't start with a chance meeting or blind date but with a trip through the ages. Time-traveling steampunk Victor Benjamin—known to many by his *nom de guerre* “The Savage Gentleman”—journeyed not miles, but centuries into the past to find his true love Lady Frost, an ice princess of a bygone era, and life hasn't been the same inside or out of the ring ever since.

“I just knew I needed her in my life, so I brought her with me,” Benjamin said of his lady love.

Benjamin learned the fine and coarse points of combat through amateur and professional MMA fighting. Now 34 years old, he took up wrestling in 2015 and wrestled his first official match the following year. Although he began his in-ring career as a singles competitor, the 6'1", 215-pound grappler found a tag team partner for life in Lady Frost.

Ms. Frost, who tips the scales at precisely 10,000 snowflakes, has a longstanding penchant for physical fitness and athleticism. With a background in various styles of dance, as well as competitive gymnastics and fitness instruction, Lady Frost is a dazzling presence in the ring, both with respect to her aesthetics and her abilities. Soon after her debut in 2018, she garnered a tryout match for WWE against Asuka. The bout was televised on *Monday Night Raw*.

Thus far, the duo has seen action in the Midwest and on the East Coast, including forays in CHIKARA and Ring of Honor. As they continue to make waves on the indie scene, they remain especially passionate about advancing intergender competition in professional wrestling. It hasn't been an easy sell to promoters who prefer more traditional matchups for their cards, but Pretty Proper didn't let early rejections change their minds. Now, they're enlightening bookers and fans alike.

“There's more chemistry when you mix and match opponents,” Lady Frost said. “Once you expand your field, the possibilities are limitless.”

“Equal rights, equal fights,” added Benjamin, echoing the slogan of the now-defunct CHIKARA.

They're formidable on their own, but Pretty Proper is at its collective best when

they're in the ring at the same time. For her part, Frost doesn't shrink from the chance to land a quick blow against one of her male opponents, especially when he's busy defending against a frontal assault of strikes from “The Savage Gentleman.” The team often puts away opponents with a devastating combo move, such as their signature finisher Savagely Ever After, a modified Death Valley Driver in which the “Gentleman” launches his Lady into a 450 splash.

While most wrestlers aspire to ply their trade on the grandest of stages, Pretty Proper maintains a modest, yet charming goal to enjoy every moment together—determined to make the most out of their shared career in the squared circle.

“We want to make a living and be happy traveling the world together,” said Benjamin.

They'd surely leap at a gig in a big-name company someday, but Lady Frost and “The Savage Gentleman” remain focused on being at their best in what they offer to their competitors and to each other. After transcending space-time itself to find each other, it appears that living for the moment is what matters most to Pretty Proper.



PHOTO BY JON WASHER

FIGHTING FARE: *ALEXANDER HAMMERSTONE*

Whether it's time to pump some iron or head out to the ring, wrestlers often find solace and stimulation through the power of music. MLW star (and noted axe-man) Alexander Hammerstone shared a few favorites with us from his personal playlist.

► **I Prevail – “Gasoline”**

I asked Twitter for workout song recommendations. I got a few good ones, a lot of bad ones, but this was by far the best. Gets me fired up in the gym every time.

► **The Strokes – “The Adults Are Talking”**

The Strokes are my all-time favorite band. I can't help but be nostalgic about their other albums, but this is my favorite song off their newest album.

► **Carpenter Brut – “Turbo Killer”**

Found this artist by complete accident. I love a good heavy/electronic/techno/dubstep vibe for working out. Skrillex is old news, Carpenter Brut kicks ass.

► **Machine Gun Kelly – “Bloody Valentine”**

This is just a throwback vibe to my high school days listening to bands like Blink-182. Gotta love it.

► **Greta Van Fleet – “Highway Tune”**

I discovered this group and specifically this song while on tour in Japan last year. I'm a huge classic rock fan and



PHOTO BY ALEXANDER HAMMERSTONE

this has that feel. Plus, the nostalgia of my time in Japan brings back memories of working out in tiny gyms with Hijo de Dr. Wagner.

CINEMATIC MATCHES WE'D LIKE TO SEE

Like 'em or lump 'em, over-the-top theatrical bouts appear to be the wave of the future. From otherworldly landscapes to sensational stipulations, the possibilities are limitless. Here are a few ideas that we'd like to see play out between the ropes and beyond.

BACH TO THE FUTURE MATCH: Chris Jericho and archenemy Sebastian Bach travel back to 1951 in a



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nuclear-powered DeLorean, where they fight to become the inventor of rock 'n' roll. The first man to appear on *American Bandstand* and make it back to the parking lot of the present-day Rock and Roll Hall of Fame will have his arm raised in victory by special guest referee Elvis Presley.

INFINITY GAUNTLET MATCH: CM Punk and “Stone Cold” Steve Austin crisscross the universe to find every original ECW title belt. The first guy to capture every strap gets to erase WWE's entire PG Era out of existence.

MIDSOMMARSLAM: Sasha Banks and Bayley meet in a village in rural Sweden for a falls count anywhere match in which the victor is crowned as the “May Queen,” winning a crown of flowers, a bearskin coat, and control of her very own ancient cult.

20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE 'E MATCH: Triple H enlists four stout men from the NXT roster to work the bellows as he travels deep into the waters of coastal Connecticut in a quest to free WWE from the tentacles of a many-armed primeval beast known as “The McKraken.”

VIKING RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK BATTLE ROYAL: Erik and Ivar lock horns with Retribution in an epic battle on an uncharted island in the Aegean Sea. The last man standing takes home the Ark of the Covenant, and everyone else gets their faces melted off by a fiery whirlwind of spirits. ■

RINGSIDE

WITH HARRY BURKETT

WHEN WILL THE COVID-19 pandemic release its grip on our world, our society, and our economy? No one knows the answer. But we're getting a clearer picture of professional wrestling's future: Our favorite pastime will never look the same.

WWE ThunderDome—housed at Orlando's Amway Center—has led the way in sports and entertainment, with fans cheering in real time on nearly 1,000 LED boards, complemented by over-the-top pyrotechnics and other special effects. Meanwhile, WWE

gutted a portion of its Performance Center facility and created the Capitol Wrestling Center, basically NXT's version of ThunderDome, unveiled at TakeOver 31.

Its name pays tribute to the Capitol Wrestling Corporation, the pre-WWWF entity founded by **Vince McMahon's** grandfather, **Jess McMahon**, that ran throughout the Northeast and as far south as Washington, D.C., in the 1950s and early-'60s.

"The Capitol Wrestling Center captures the feel and the vibe of NXT," WWE Executive Vice President **Triple H** told *Sports*

Illustrated's si.com. "It's edgier, darker, and raw—you're walking into the ultimate heavy metal soundstage." In addition to many ThunderDome-style LED screens, up to 100 people—including genuine fans, trainees, and family and friends of superstars—will add to the atmosphere. Social distancing will be observed, monitored by medical staff and adhering to Florida's live-attendance guidelines.

And the tie-in with the old CWC? "To me, it feels like we're going back to 1953," Triple H added. "Just like then, we're doing something different and new, taking the business to a whole new level."

Indeed, NXT TakeOver 31 opened with a video showing historic paperwork establishing the Capitol Wrestling Corporation along with vintage wrestling footage. It's interesting that Triple H felt obligated to use a touchstone of the past to endorse such a bold move into the future.

The action at TakeOver 31 vindicated the investment. All four champions who defended their titles at the October 4 event emerged victorious, with NXT champion **Finn Balor** defeating **Kyle O'Reilly** in a tremendous, hard-hitting 29-minute match; Women's champion **Io Shirai** overcame the interference of **Johnny Gargano** to pin **Candice LeRae**; cruiserweight champion **Santos Escobar** planted **Isaiah Scott** with a double-underhook gutbuster for the win; and **Damian Priest** proved his worth as North American champion with a big victory over Gargano. In the only non-title bout, **Kushida** used his Hoverboard Lock to force **Velveteen Dream** into submission.

Obviously, WWE has plenty of cash to transform its arenas into virtual spectacles. But other promotions are opting for a more back-to-basics approach, also

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Finn Balor puts the hurt on Kyle O'Reilly in the main event of TakeOver 31, which was the first event to emanate from the newly christened Capitol Wrestling Center.



ROH tag champs Jay Lethal and Jonathan Gresham each fared well in the company's Pure title tourney, but it was Gresham who would go on to win the whole thing ... becoming a double champion in the process.

reminiscent of the 1950s—and it's working. Participants weren't instructed to wear wool tights, but rule enforcement and scientific grappling were on display during Ring of Honor's recent Pure championship tournament.

Ring of Honor had been dormant since last spring due to COVID-19, and it created a bubble-type environment for the 16-man tourney at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, back in August. This also helped prevent spoilers, as the ongoing event aired on *Ring Of Honor Wrestling* from September 11 to November 1.

Jonathan Gresham, already co-holder of the ROH tag team title with **Jay Lethal**, became a double champion, overcoming **Wheeler Yuta**, **Matt Sydal**, and **Josh Woods** before defeating **Tracy Williams** in the final. Knowing how ambitious "The

Octopus" is these days, he must have been particularly proud to beat Williams, who had defeated his mentor, Lethal, earlier in the tournament.

The event also served as a coming-out party for ROH prospects who scored wins over company veterans, which included Josh Woods over both **PJ Black** and **Kenny King**, and **Fred Yehi** over **Silas Young**.

The relaunch of the Pure championship after a 14-year hiatus was met with enthusiastic acclaim from ROH's wrestling-starved fanbase, and it provided a refreshing alternative to WWE and AEW's often desperate attempts to compensate for the loss of their high-capacity crowds.

Desperate? Just as WWE's use of elaborate cinematic bouts—including **The Undertaker** vs. **AJ Styles** at WrestleMania 36 and this year's Money in the Bank

ladder matches—ignites polarizing debates among fans, AEW's increasing use of high-camp comedy, sometimes quite clever and other times reminiscent of WCW and TNA, is also a controversial issue. **MJF** hiring a lawyer who becomes an in-ring participant? Inner Circle town halls? **Dr. Britt Baker** and a naked **Tony Schiavone**? **Kenny Omega**, **Michael Nakazawa**, and sexual references on *Being The Elite*?

While some of these segments get a few laughs, such as the Baker-Schiavone skits, what happened to AEW's sports-driven product that emphasizes wins and losses? Are these segments detrimental to AEW in the long term?

Orange Cassidy battling TNT champion **Cody Rhodes** to a 20-minute draw on the October 14 edition of *Dynamite* epitomized what AEW should be all about. Humorous quips and small doses of comedy are fine (see: **Chris Jericho**), but segments that are ridiculous from the start make viewers question the premise of the entire show.

And this takes us to Impact Wrestling. Bound for Glory received mostly positive reviews, primarily for **Rich Swann's** dramatic heavyweight title win over the dastardly **Eric Young**, but a wrestling wedding—yes, a wedding—was the focus of the October 27 edition of *Impact Wrestling*. While Impact Creative employed a tongue-in-cheek approach to the nuptials between **John E. Bravo** and **Rosemary**, it still had echoes of, yes, the dodgier sides of WCW and TNA. Turning the wedding into a whodunit mystery—with Bravo being shot (!)—was hardly redeeming.

Impact seems to have lost its red-hot intensity overnight. What's next, an homage to the Survivor Series double-cross? I'd like to think the **Scott D'Amore-Don Callis** regime wouldn't have attempted this



Harry Burkett feels AEW is at its best when presenting solid in-ring action—like this October 14 TNT title bout between Cody Rhodes and Orange Cassidy—and not over-the-top comedy sketches.

during normal times. This virus is ruining our lives!

Congratulations to **Randy Orton**, who defeated **Drew McIntyre** for his 14th WWE title at Hell in a Cell, tying Triple-H for the highest number of reigns in the 57-year history of the championship. **Ric Flair** and **John Cena** co-hold the record for the most world-title reigns overall, with 16 apiece. McIntyre made a valiant last stand that would make Braveheart proud, but the wily Orton used the demonic structure to his advantage, at one point knocking McIntyre off the cell and onto the announcers table far below.

If you ask me, McIntyre simply ran out of energy as champion, surviving one vicious challenge after another during a seven-month reign without live audiences. I fully expect McIntyre to recalibrate and hopefully become champion again during better days.

On the other hand, **Paul Heyman**—just as he did for former client **Brock Lesnar**—has taught **Roman Reigns** how to plug into the Universal championship as his power source in WWE. Anyone who wants to take Reigns' Universal title must beat him physically and mentally, and that person may not exist on the Smackdown roster. Reigns' successful title defense against **Jey Uso** inside the Hell in a Cell, his brutalization of **Jimmy Uso**, and the subsequent endorsement by **Afa and Sika Anoa'i** all demonstrate that the "Tribal Chief" is more dangerous than ever.

Also at the October 25 event, **Sasha Banks** gained revenge against former best friend **Bayley**, stopping her record-smashing Smackdown Women's title reign at 380 days inside the HIAC. Bayley's use of a steel chair worked against her this time around, as she jabbed herself in the ribs with a chair coming off

the second rope when Banks moved out of the way. When she attempted to use the chair again, Sasha trapped her in the Banks Statement with Bayley's head inside the chair, forcing the tapout to secure her first Smackdown Women's title.

This 'n' that: Brock Lesnar possibly signing with AEW is one of the most intriguing rumors out there now ... British star **Ridge Holland** scored a quick win over **Danny Burch**, only to suffer a serious knee injury during a post-match altercation with **Oney Lorcan**, during the October 7 edition of *NXT* ... The 55th Annual Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion is scheduled for April 25 to April 28, 2021, at the Gold Coast Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.

Speaking of which, **Jim Valley**—the host of CAC's podcast and all-around mat expert—is making steady strides, recovering from a rare autoimmune disease. He's battled severe laryngitis and pneumonia, and temporarily lost his ability to speak, during the illness. *Figure Four Online* editor **Bryan Alvarez** reported having a six-minute conversation with Valley and noted that he's upbeat.

Some sad news to report. **Tracy Smothers**, the quintessential modern-day journeyman wrestler, died at age 58 on October 28. He had fought lymphoma for the past 11 months. Despite a stint in WCW and a brief run as **Freddie Joe Floyd** in the WWF, Smothers' career highlight was holding the Smoky Mountain heavyweight title in 1993. He enjoyed a resurgence in an unlikely place, ECW, in the late-1990s, as **Little Guido's** partner in **The Full-Blooded Italians**, managed by **Tommy Rich**. The FBI's matches against **Axl Rotten** and **Mahoney** were chair-swinging slugfests. Claiming to be from Nashville, Italy, Smothers added some



Tracy Smothers battles the late Chris Candido in a ladder match at Smoky Mountain Wrestling. Smothers was not only tough, but, by all accounts, a deeply kind, humble man.

Southern seasoning to the “Land Of Extreme.”

Len Rossi, a Yankee of Italian heritage who became a hero throughout the South, passed away at age 91 on October 9. Rossi was born to migrant parents in Utica, New York, and became a wrestler under the guidance of promoter **Ed Don George**. He traveled down to Tennessee, where he teamed with veteran **Tex Riley** to defeat **The Fargo Brothers** for the NWA Mid-America version of the world tag team title. Rossi would go on to win that championship 13 more times with Riley and other partners. He also reigned as NWA Southern junior heavyweight champion for much of the 1960s. After an auto accident ended his wrestling career in 1972, he turned to healthy living and owned Len Rossi's Health Foods in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Lorraine Johnson, mother of “**Baby Doll**” **Nickla Roberts** and a star

of the 1950s and '60s, died at age 90 on October 5. Johnson was from Red Wing, Minnesota, and once told reporters that winning the Minnesota Lady Wrestling crown was her proudest achievement, although she's best known for holding the World Women's tag team title with fellow blonde **Penny Banner**. She left her first husband, Minnesota wrestler **Mario DeSouza**, to marry Texas wrestler and promoter **Nick Roberts**, and the two promoted cards in Lubbock for many years.

“She was my idol, I wanted to be just like her,” Nickla Roberts posted on Facebook. “Not only was she beautiful and athletic, she was very smart and always wanting to know more. She taught me so much. She was my Google before there was Google. I'm really, really going to miss calling her and asking her advice.”

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

A CAPITOL GOOD JOB!

I would have never guessed that WWE, which hasn't always been eager to celebrate its own history, would somehow give a nod to the Capitol Wrestling Corporation in the year 2020. This is another occasion when Triple H has proven to be not only a great son-in-law to Vince McMahon, but also his best friend. Hopefully we won't wait long for tributes to Antonino Rocca, “Sailor” Art Thomas, and Hatpin Mary.

OLD-SCHOOL ROH

I'm nearly beyond the coveted 18- to 49-year-old demographic, and perhaps I'm too critical of WWE and AEW, but I feel wrestling is at its best in its purest form. That's what Ring of Honor offered through its Pure championship tournament. Since the advent of COVID-19 restrictions this spring, I've said that wrestling should embrace the intimacy of the current environment, not avoid it. Well done, Jonathan Gresham and ROH.

WHO SHOT JOHN E.?

Okay, is it *Impact Wrestling* or *Impact Weddings*? I admit to being grumpy about this issue, and I realize this may be a generational difference. I laud the Scott D'Amore-Don Callis regime for their efforts in Impact Wrestling. But here's my bottom-line analysis about comedy in wrestling: Characters can be funny, and wrestlers can be witty, but the premise shouldn't be ridiculous. Wrestling weddings should go extinct, like wrestling bears.

R.I.P. GENTLEMEN

Reviewing the obits for this column, I find it interesting that we have a Southerner trying to make it as an Italian (Tracy Smothers) and an Italian trying to make it as a Southerner (Len Rossi). But they had one thing in common: They were true gentlemen who made lots of friends in the business. Indie wrestler Beau James says that Tracy had recently offered him condolences on his mother's passing. He was considerate to the end.

QUICK COUNT

BY AL CASTLE

OVER THE YEARS, a lot of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* legends have taken the credit—or the blame—for coming up with the idea for the *PWI* “500” nearly 30 years ago. To ensure my place in *PWI* folklore is never lost, let me go on the record and proclaim that the “Tag Team 50” list, making its debut in this issue, was my brainchild. So, overworked *PWI* writers: Feel free to direct your hate mail my way.

Unfortunately, many duos of yesteryear never got the recognition they deserve. And so, I’m happy to give them a quick shout-out in this classic tag team-themed edition of “Quick Count.” You can read it together with a partner, but only until the count of five.

DEMOLITION

It may not exactly be Madison Square Garden, but the Fort Worth Convention Center hosted its share of memorable wrestling moments over the years, including many a World Class Championship Wrestling “Star Wars” event in the 1980s, a Ric Flair vs. Sting NWA World title bout in 1990, and a televised cage match between two of the biggest names the sport has ever seen—“Stone Cold” Steve Austin and The Rock—in 2001.

Unfortunately, the next explosive event to take place at the Texas arena will involve actual explosives, as the venue is set to

be torn down to make space for a new convention center.

It’s the latest heartbreaker for wrestling history buffs, who already lost the famed Joe Louis Arena in Detroit, Michigan, in March ... and have witnessed many more legendary venues go up in smoke in recent years.

To be sure, progress is good. And performers and pro athletes must appreciate the amenities that come with snazzy new arenas. But no number of flat screen TVs in a dressing room or swank luxury boxes can replace the history that was made in some of wrestling’s most classic venues.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS

Fans are never happy to see their favorite wrestling TV shows bumped from their usual time slots. But TNT’s airing of the NBA playoffs this past fall had one positive, if unintended, consequence: It reminded fans how fun it is to watch wrestling late at night.

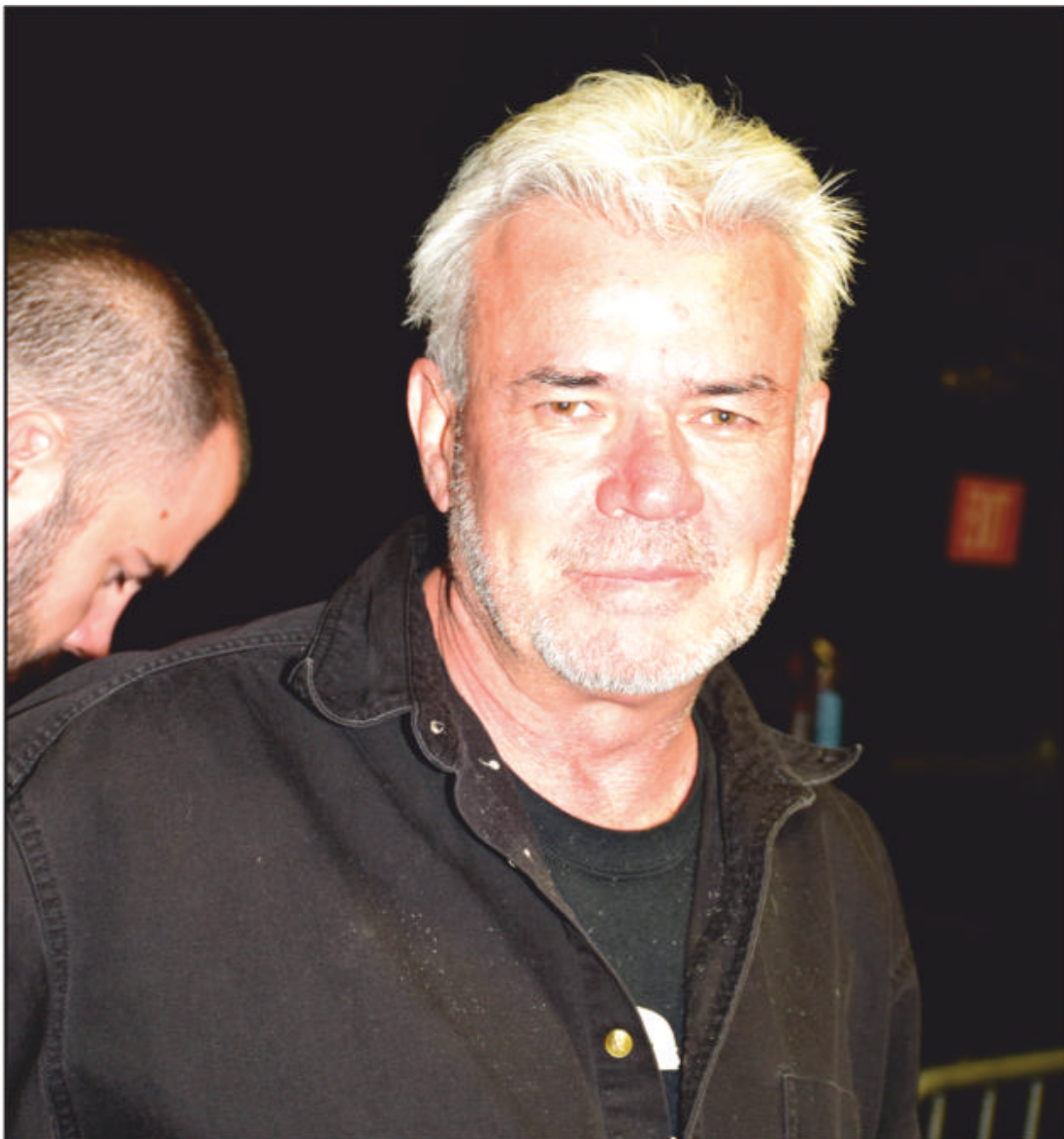
Growing up in the 1980s, there was nothing more exciting than tuning in to NBC at 11:30 p.m. on a Saturday night and hearing Don Pardo announce that *Saturday Night Live* would not be airing in its usual time slot, “so that we can bring you this special broadcast of *Saturday Night’s Main Event*.” Whether mom and dad knew it or not, many a little Hulkamaniac was staying up way past his bedtime.

AEW fans got a taste of the thrill of after-hours wrestling in September, with the premiere of *Late Night Dynamite*, a one-hour special that aired around 12:30 on a Tuesday night—or, technically, Wednesday morning. The show, headlined by Shawn Spears taking on Matt Sydal, drew a respectable 585,000 viewers.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHW/AEW

In late-September, night owls were treated to the premiere of *Late Night Dynamite*, featuring this match where rookie Anna Jay put Brandi Rhodes to sleep with her signature “Queen Slayer” hold.



After years of taking it on the chin—relatively speaking—Eric Bischoff has now found a captive audience for his no-holds-barred podcast, *Eric Fires Back*.

Primetime may be the most coveted real estate in the TV business, but there's nothing wrong with the occasional, one-man twilight wrestling viewing party—especially with some Oreos and milk.

NASTY BOYS

All Elite Wrestling again turned back the clock with what may have been the most high-profile dog collar match since Greg Valentine and Roddy Piper went at it at the first Starrcade in 1983. And, after the witnessing the brutality displayed by Cody Rhodes and Brodie Lee, some fans were in no rush to see another match of its type for another 37 years.

AEW marked the first anniversary of *Dynamite* with the bloody brawl for the TNT championship. Though well-executed, the gruesome match, which saw both men wear the proverbial “crimson

mask,” was uncomfortable to watch at times, especially given how much mainstream wrestling has dialed back the gore in recent years.

Under the right circumstances, a little “color” can certainly elevate the emotional quotient of a match. And maybe the high-stakes rematch between Rhodes and Lee did present those circumstances. But, while looking to appeal to hardcore fans, AEW has to be careful not to alienate those who are understandably uneasy about seeing two men bleed all over each other in the middle of a pandemic.

DOOM

The Red Rooster. Arachnaman. Shorty G. There are some wrestling gimmicks that are destined for failure from the moment they debut on TV. Add to that list: Retribution.

With their low-rent *Mad Max* cosplay, rope-cutting chainsaws,

and goofy names like “Slapjack” and “T-Bar,” the WWE invaders never stood much of a chance of getting over. Instead, Retribution served only to saddle a number of talented prospects, like Dominik Dijakovic and Mia Yim, with a go-nowhere gimmick upon their debuts on WWE's main brands.

As the professionals they are, Retribution's members are doing their best to whip up some quality chicken salad. But, hopefully, WWE's creative brain-trust doesn't wait too long to come to the same conclusion it did recently with Chad Gable: Sometimes, saving a good wrestler means letting go of a bad idea.

PUBLIC ENEMY

With his Ken doll good looks, perfectly-coifed hair, and smug attitude, Eric Bischoff has been taking shots from wrestlers and wrestling insiders for more than 30 years. And now, he's shooting back.

On the heels of his successful podcast *83 Weeks*, Bischoff and partner Conrad Thompson recently launched a spinoff series titled *Eric Fires Back*. The former World Championship Wrestling executive vice president uses the platform to respond to some of his most venomous critics with some venom of his own.

Among Bischoff's targets: Mike Graham, Greg Gagne, and Jim Cornette, whom he dubbed a “gutless little punk” for accusing him of sabotaging an angle involving Smoky Mountain Wrestling in WCW in 1993.

Despite his numerous contributions to the sport, including the popularization of cruiserweight wrestling, the New World Order, and live Monday night wrestling, Bischoff is too often treated like a punching bag by those with axes to grind. It's good to finally see “Eazy-E” make easy work of his naysayers. □

THE LOCKUP

BY BRIAN SOLOMON

IT WAS A sunny afternoon in Flushing, Queens, in May 2001. I was at Shea Stadium—that was where the Mets played baseball before Citi Field, kids—in my capacity as staff writer for *WWF Magazine*, to cover Taz throwing out the ceremonial first pitch as the Mets took on the L.A. Dodgers. After the pitch, I got to spend the game in a “luxury” box at Shea with Taz and his family. It was a telling experience being around the man who had at that time spent almost a year and a half struggling to find his place in the WWF after years of being such a dominant force in ECW.

One thing I distinctly remember are the conversations I overheard between the Red Hook, Brooklyn native and then-head WWF TV writer Brian Gewirtz, an incurable Mets fanatic who had come along that day, as well. Understandably, Taz was a bit frustrated with his place in the WWF pecking order and the fact that creative didn't seem to have much for him. Granted, mounting injuries had made in-ring competition difficult for the “Human Suplex Machine,” who up to that point had only wrestled eight times the entire year—the last one being over a month prior at WrestleMania 17, in which he joined the APA for a less-than-memorable six-man against Right to Censor (remember them?). For the most part, he

had been relegated to his brand-new role as TV announcer, as well as being a satellite member of the doomed WCW/ECW Alliance. He didn't even have an on-air feud to speak of.

It was quite the comedown for the man who had been one of the Mount Rushmore faces of Paul Heyman's ECW, with

significant reigns as tag team, TV, and heavyweight champion, and unforgettable battles against the likes of Sabu, Shane Douglas, Rob Van Dam, and so many others. Taz had debuted super strong at the 2000 Royal Rumble, ending the undefeated streak of Kurt Angle. But the momentum didn't last long, and ECW fans were left scratching their heads at how the man who had torn through everyone in South Philly was left floundering on the mid-card. It was the classic phenomenon of the big fish in a small pond, now finding himself lost at sea. Aside from a quick one-off at ECW One Night Stand against Jerry Lawler, Taz's in-ring career ended in WWE in 2002, teaming with Rikishi in a failed attempt to win the World tag team title from Billy and Chuck at a Smackdown house show.



In 1998, Taz dragon suplexes Rob Van Dam at the old ECW Arena. While the Red Hook, Brooklyn native was positively explosive in the “Land of Extreme,” his in-ring career faded with a whisper in WWE.



In AEW, Taz has found a new calling providing his managerial services—and lending needed credibility—to Ricky Starks and Brian Cage (seen wearing Taz's old FTW title belt).

Injury and creative misfires had brought an end to Taz the wrestler, but it soon became clear that he could remain relevant thanks to one of the very assets that had brought him so much attention and success in ECW: his relentless gift of gab. A born talker with a streetwise edge and a cutting sense of humor, Taz succeeded as a full-time announcer and, later, as a podcast host.

But it is only now, since going “All Elite,” that Taz has finally been allowed to shine in a way he hasn’t since his days slapping on the *katahajime* (his judo chokehold). It’s amazing to think that, up until now, no one had thought to make Taz a manager. But, ever since taking on that role back in May, he has grown into it like a natural, excelling like previous superstar wrestlers-turned-managers from years gone by such as Wild Red Berry, Freddie Blassie, Sherri Martel, and Harley Race.

As the mouthpiece for Brian Cage and Ricky Starks, Taz has truly found his niche, bringing fire on the mic as only he can, and doing what the great managers have always done—drawing major heat for his men, building fan anticipation for upcoming matches, and bringing undeniable charisma to the proceedings. In the case of Cage, who has sometimes been criticized for having not much more to offer than a million-dollar physique, Taz’s expertise and skill have distracted from his man’s weaknesses and accentuated his strengths ... another important job of the wrestling manager. To put it bluntly, Taz has managed to make Brian Cage interesting.

Starks may not need Taz as much in the talking department, but Taz has still given the relative newcomer an instant aura of legitimacy simply by being in his corner. Team FTW is a force to be reckoned with in AEW, and that

is largely thanks to the presence of Taz.

In fact, Taz has done such a powerful job of speaking for his men that his Twitter detractors (there are always plenty) have accused him of overshadowing them. Clearly, those folks have never witnessed the Grand Wizard going apoplectic over the virtues of Ken Patera, or Jim Cornette blowing a gasket extolling the praises of Big Bubba Rogers. Simply put, that is exactly what a great manager is supposed to do.

Not blessed with enormous size, what Taz always had going for him were three main virtues: explosive wrestling skill, a fero-

cious killer instinct, and the ability to talk fans into the seats. Robbed of the first virtue by time and injury, he still possesses the latter two in great abundance. And it is refreshing and satisfying to see a wrestling promotion giving him the platform to put them to good use in a way he never really has before. As they’ve done with Jon Moxley, FTR, Orange Cassidy, Brodie Lee, and others, Tony Khan and company have proven apt at finding a place for Taz, allowing him to excel by playing to his strengths and putting him in a position to thrive. For Taz, it has been nothing short of a career renaissance for someone who had seemingly been relegated to the periphery of the business.

Having watched first-hand as Taz struggled in the WWF/E, it is particularly vindicating for me to now see him doing so well again. Even if he still owes me for buying his son French fries that day at Shea. □

WIN, LOSE, or DRAW

BY HARRY BURKETT

MY TAKEAWAY FROM FTR's number-one ranking in our inaugural "Tag Team 50" is this: Truly great tag teams are dedicated to being one unit, with shared aspirations and in-ring repertoires that complement each other.

Dax Harwood and Cash Wheeler also take pride in being a technical tag team, inspired by The Brain Busters and The Midnight Express, specializing in quick in-and-out tags, double-team moves, and teeing up opponents for their partners' individual maneuvers.

If you've seen FTR's Goodnight Express codebreaker-style finisher, Anderson DDTing a foe before Blanchard drops a flying elbow smash, or the Midnight's Veg-O-Matic, flapjack, or double goozle, you've seen the synergy necessary to be a great technical tag team.

While I think the cohesive-unit technical model is ideal, there are plenty of other tag team templates. Let's examine a few of these.

Superstar Combos: Vince McMahon is said to prefer superstar combos because he likes to use tag team wrestling to promote singles headliners. The problem is these partnerships don't last due to individual egos and priorities. Seth Rollins and Braun Strowman, who held the WWE Raw tag team title briefly in 2019, would be an example. Bob Backlund and Pedro Morales

had to vacate the WWF tag team championship after defeating The Samoans at Shea Stadium in 1980, due to Backlund's full slate of WWF heavyweight title defenses. Poor Pedro! Others include The Two-Man Power Trip (Steve Austin and Triple H), The Mega Powers (Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage), and The Super Powers (Dusty Rhodes and Nikita Koloff).

High-Spot Artists: This is a fairly new phenomenon in the U.S., especially prevalent in AEW. The Young Bucks have taken this style further than anyone, combining personal chemistry with outlandish offensive moves. Why is this style criticized? Because their maneuvers often require so much elaborate setup with

relatively little payoff (i.e. punishment to one's opponent), only for all participants to quickly scramble to their feet in time for the next dance number. Private Party, The Lucha Bros., and Best Friends fit in this category, too.

Brothers: I referred to Nick and Matt Jackson's remarkable teamwork, as if they're sharing the same thoughts simultaneously. Brothers have that knack. A list of notable sibling pairings would be too long to include here, but probably the most impressive from recent times is The Hardy Boyz. Matt and Jeff Hardy are the fore-runners to The Young Bucks, and neither Matt nor Jeff would've had the opportunity to taste singles success if not for their groundbreaking work as a tag team.

Faux Brothers: There aren't many faux-brother tag teams today, but they flourished during the kayfabe era. Four of the "not actually related" tag teams were The Graham Brothers (Eddie and Dr. Jerry), The Valiant Brothers (Jimmy and Johnny, and later Jerry), The Anderson Brothers (Gene and Ole), and The Strongbow Brothers (Chief Jay and Jules). It's a testament to these teams that fans didn't even



Makeshift teams like Braun Strowman and Seth Rollins can be successful in the short term. However, as Harry Burkett notes, individual egos usually make these duos unsustainable.

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The pairing of Silas Young and Josh Woods is the perfect example of a teacher-student team. Young offers his protege wisdom and experience, while Woods helps keep Young on the straight and narrow.

question whether they were related, thanks mostly to their promos and in-ring teamwork.

Teacher-Student: Silas Young and Josh Woods, “2G1T” (Two Guys One Team), are a terrific teacher-student duo. Both men benefit from the relationship. Woods gains from Young’s experience and tutelage, and Young feeds off Woods’ popularity and enthusiasm. Not only has Woods inspired wrestling’s “Last Real Man” to cut back on his smoking, but there’s also evidence that Young is actually evolving into a better human being. Back in 1983, Sgt. Slaughter and young recruit Pvt. Kernodle became incredibly dominant NWA World tag team champions before losing the belts to Rick Steamboat and Jay Youngblood in a historic steel cage bloodbath in Greensboro, North Carolina. Traditionally, there are two ways these relationships play out. The frustrated student betrays his teacher (e.g. Larry Zbyszko and Bruno Sammartino) or the teacher becomes jealous of his student’s youth and potential (e.g. Mr. Wrestling II and Magnum T.A.).

Frenemies: Perhaps the riskiest kind of alliance, it can pay off big time if the frenemies can make

suke Nakamura—to face The New Day on *Smackdown* in their final match as a trio, one could still feel the magic. A classic example would be those rare occasions when Ric Flair teamed with Rick Steamboat in the Mid-Atlantic. Fans embraced those matches because Flair was bound to turn on Steamboat sooner or later.

Monsters: It’s breathtaking when two behemoths join forces. The Undertaker and Kane, the “Brothers Of Destruction,” are probably the best example, although fans never seemed to get enough of them despite their two WWE World tag team title reigns. At a combined weight of 811 pounds, Kane and The Big Show enjoyed an incredible hot streak in 2005-06, steamrolling all challengers to their World tag title and scoring a major victory over World heavyweight champion Batista and Rey Mysterio Jr. Honorable mentions go to Big Boss Man and Akeem, The Missing Link and Kamala, and Crusher Blackwell and Ken Patera (because of his monstrous strength).

Front Man/Wing Man: Consider the lead vocalist of any rock band and how he absorbs most of the

a genuine truce. Sheamus and Cesaro were intense rivals who were sort of lost as singles wrestlers, and it wasn’t until the popular Cesaro fully embraced Sheamus’ heel tendencies that The Bar became one of the most effective teams in WWE history. When Sheamus reunited with Cesaro—along with Cesaro’s partner, Shin-

attention and energy on stage. But that’s not so bad for the rest of his mates because they’ll settle for the leftovers. The Rockers immediately come to mind, with Shawn Michaels being five years younger and five years better-looking than Marty Jannetty. After Jannetty crashed through a barber shop window, Michaels became a WWE legend. The same dynamic was at work for The Rock ‘n’ Roll Express, with Rick Morton doing most of the talking, connecting with the camera, and causing the teenyboppers to cry their eyes out. Robert Gibson was secure enough to understand his own contributions were indispensable, and was happy to cash in on Morton’s charisma.

Odd Couple: I’m referring to odd couples, both physically and in temperament. Forgotten for the most part, but effective while they were together, was the duo of Chris Jericho and The Big Show. Jericho didn’t mind hastily asking a giant—who overshadowed him by an entire foot—to replace his partner, an injured Edge, at 2009’s Night of Champions. Big Show helped him overwhelm Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes that night, and Jeri-Show would go on to reign as WWE World tag champs for nearly five months. Other notables include Kerry Von Erich/Michael Hayes, Kelly Kiniski/One Man Gang, and Verne Gagne/Mad Dog Vachon. These teams were capable of brief flashes of brilliance, but didn’t have long-term compatibility.

Of course, there are many other types of tandems, including Drinking Buddies (Dick Murdoch and Dusty Rhodes), Crazy Kooks (Jimmy Valiant and Buggy McGraw), Leader-Acolyte (Kevin Sullivan and The Purple Haze), Pen-Pals (Kevin Von Erich and Chris Adams), Matching Tights (The Killer Bees), Nothing Else To Do (Curtis Axel and Bo Dallas), and I could go on and on ... □

HOTSEAT

AN INCISIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE SPORT'S TOP STARS



PHOTO BY SADIEL "SPEEDY" RUJZ/AEW

DAX HARWOOD AND Cash Wheeler, formerly The Revival, are now The Revitalized. They walked away from WWE, WrestleMania, unparalleled exposure, and tremendous financial security in exchange for the challenge of proving themselves all over again, the opportunity to forge an even greater legacy, and the risk of losing everything.

A few months since appearing on the May 27 edition of AEW **Dynamite**, it seems as if Harwood and Wheeler—now known simply as FTR—made the right decision. They are the AEW World tag team champions, and, as you've learned from this issue, they are number one in **PWI's** inaugural "Tag Team 50" rankings.

When news of the impending "Tag Team 50" broke on social media, Harwood tweeted that **PWI** was unlikely to grant FTR the top spot. Maybe Harwood thought we would hold FTR's new heelish tendencies against them, particularly their heinous attack on the legendary Rock 'n' Roll Express during a "Tag Team Appreciation Night" edition of **Dynamite**. Or maybe he assumed there was an implicit bias against FTR's more grounded, technical style.

Yet it's hard to deny excellence, no matter the form it takes. Harwood and Wheeler became, arguably, NXT's first great tag team in 2016, thanks to their intense rivalry with DIY (Tommaso Ciampa and Johnny Gargano) and their two NXT tag team championships. They shined on the Raw and Smackdown rosters, too, earning world tag team titles on both brands.

Harwood and Wheeler boosted the value of tag team action in WWE and are now leading the tag team renaissance in AEW. Senior Writer Harry Burkett interviewed FTR about their newly confirmed status as the sport's number one tag team, their impact on WWE, and the prospects of a Four Horsemen "revival" in AEW during a 40-minute session.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

Cash Wheeler and Dax Harwood are flanked by no less an authority on tag team wrestling than Tully Blanchard. The association has led some to speculate whether a new version of the Four Horsemen might be in the works ... with FTR playing a major role.

Burkett: Congratulations to both of you for being ranked number one in *PWI*'s very first "Tag Team 50" rankings. Are either of you the least bit surprised that you're number one?

Harwood: Of course, you know I made that little comment. I was surprised when we got the news, if only because we're not your typical 2020 tag team. We're not the flashiest guys in the world. We don't have the coolest wrestling moves in the world. But, in the same breath, I know we're the best tag team in the world.

Wheeler: I was surprised, for sure. Not that we had any doubt we're the number-one team in the world, but that we're finally getting the recognition that we

deserve. We've been telling everybody who'd listen for the past seven years that we are without a doubt the best tag team walking the planet. We were the first-ever two-time NXT tag team champions. We were WWE's first-ever grand slam tag team champions, and the first-ever tag team to hold the NXT, Raw, Smackdown, and AEW tag team titles. So, we've made it a habit to be the first ever and the number one in everything. Now we're the first-ever number one in *PWI*'s "Tag Team 50."

Burkett: Defeating Kenny Omega and "Hangman" Page for the World tag team title has been your biggest achievement in AEW. Now, incidentally, Omega

and Page are ranked number two. So, that gives you some bragging rights in the dressing room. But what else would you put in your top two or three moments in AEW so far?

Harwood: Cash and me defeating "Hangman" and Omega was not only the highlight of our AEW career so far, but it's the highlight of our career, period. I say this from the humblest part of my body, everywhere we've gone, we've won championships, we won NXT's Tag Team of the Year and Match of the Year. And we left all that behind because we wanted to achieve more. We came to AEW to achieve the ultimate goal of being the AEW World tag team

"We wanted to make sure we were the best working unit the company had ever seen."



From young teams like Private Party (above) to former world champions like SCU (below), FTR has a way of bringing out the best in their opponents.



champions. That's something you can't erase.

I think you know another highlight for us is getting together with Tully Blanchard. Obviously, there's comparisons between us and Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard. They're a huge influence on us. The ultimate highlight is still to come, the match that everyone's waiting for, against The Young Bucks. That's where we can cement our

legacy as the greatest tag team of a generation.

Wheeler: To his point, the win over "Hangman" and Omega was the most vindicating for us, because this was the culmination of a couple of years of frustration. It wasn't nobody's fault, it just wasn't gelling. We took the biggest risk you can take in 2020, and we left the comfort of the biggest wrestling company in the world and jumped to this new,

hot wrestling company. It was scary for us because that was walking away from everything we thought we wanted to something brand-new, but it's worked out well for us. And we're so happy we did because we have zero regrets. The win over "Hangman" and Omega really cemented that for us.

Burkett: Now you're looking forward to matches against The Young Bucks. That's quite a contrast of styles and also philosophy because you're more grounded workers that can do high-flying, but The Young Bucks are known as very dynamic high-spot artists. Do you see that as a challenge, or do you think you'll complement each other?

Harwood: Since we've arrived in AEW, that's been the challenge for us . . . a contrast of styles against everyone here. I don't think there's any team in the world—and that encompasses AEW, WWE, New Japan, and independent wrestling—that wrestles like us. But we had a very memorable match with The Lucha Bros., and a knockdown, drag-out match with Jungle Boy and Luchasaurus. On the other side of the coin, Butcher and Blade were a team that was kind of lost, and we got to work with them. People saw a whole different side of them, and now they care about them. The Young Bucks and the style they bring, against the style we bring, is going to make for an incredible kickass tag team match for the ages.

Wheeler: It's a pride thing for us because, for the longest time, FTR and The Young Bucks have

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been the two greatest teams in the world. Now we're the AEW tag team champions, and *PWI* has ranked us the number-one tag team in the world. And these guys have done things in Japan, Ring of Honor, and AEW that have helped carry tag team wrestling. Now we want that legacy for ourselves.

Burkett: Looking back at some of your more notable moments in AEW, I've got to mention "Tag Team Appreciation Night," when you attacked The Rock 'n' Roll Express with Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard on hand. It's hard to characterize a heinous attack as a special moment or a highlight, but what kind of energy did you feel in the ring and in the building that night?

Harwood: You're right. Aside from the AEW World tag team championship match we had with "Hangman" and Omega, that may be the highlight of our AEW career. We attacked The Rock 'n' Roll Express. No one saw it coming. And we got to do it, side by side, with two of the greatest tag teams ever, The Young Bucks and Arn and Tully. I had tears in my eyes afterwards, and it was all in the name of tag team wrestling.

Wheeler: That was the moment we turned the corner. We weren't just guys there to have good matches. We got to show the vicious side of ourselves, finding somebody's weaknesses and exploiting them to our advantage. If you look at it, the comparisons between ourselves and The Young Bucks are very similar to the comparisons between Arn and Tully and The Rock 'n' Roll Express. Arn and Tully were regarded as the greatest technical tag team in history, and The Rock 'n' Roll Express were two of the most exciting babyface

wrestlers in the world. We wanted that visual, the contrast of styles between those two teams, and the contrast of styles between ourselves and The Young Bucks.

Burkett: Both of you have mentioned Tully Blanchard so far. What is the best advice he's given you?

Harwood: I've been wrestling for 16 years now, a very, very long time. There comes a time when your own ego catches up to you, and you think you've got this thing down pat, and then you talk to someone like Tully Blanchard and you realize you ain't got it down pat.

We recently had the gauntlet match with Best Friends, The Young Bucks, and Dustin Rhodes and QT Marshall. We were the last team to go out because we were ranked number one. The interviewer asked, "Do you have an advantage being last?" My initial thought was to exploit that, and be this cocky heel, and say, "Yeah, of course we have an advantage and we're going to use that advantage." Tully spun it a completely different way. He said,

and I'm paraphrasing, "It often takes about eight or 10 minutes for you to get your juices going, to get your body warmed up, and we're coming in there cold. These guys we're coming to face, they're already warmed up and they're ready to go. So maybe we're at a disadvantage." By saying that, he let the fans know how the gimmick of a gauntlet actually works, and he gave the other guys some credibility. So, if and when we did beat them, we beat a credible team.

Burkett: This begs another question: The rumors are out there, about a revival, so to speak, of the Four Horsemen. Arn Anderson has given interviews and mentioned you first and foremost, and he's also mentioned people like Cody Rhodes and Brodie Lee. What do you think of the idea in general? Would that be a step forward for you?

Wheeler: To be mentioned in the same breath as the Four Horsemen is extremely flattering, probably one of the best compliments we'll ever get. But I don't think there's ever gonna be a

FTR knock "Hangman" Adam Page silly with their signature spike piledriver at September's All Out. They would ultimately defeat Page and Kenny Omega to become AEW World tag team champs.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

way to copy that. What they had, everything they did was organic. That's why it worked so well, because it wasn't forced, and it wasn't something thought up in a creative room with a bunch of guys who had no wrestling experience and just a couple of college degrees. It was four guys, plus J.J. [Dillon], who each had something separate and special to contribute.

Harwood: Ric Flair has given his blessing, and obviously Arn and Tully as well. That was a once-in-a-lifetime group that can never be replicated. And if you try to replicate it, you're going backwards. That's why we left our former employer, because we don't want to go backwards. We always want to go forward, and we want to take professional wrestling forward with us. However, the blueprint of the Four Horsemen is a goal and a theme we could absolutely run with. We could make AEW the top wrestling company in the world by having a group of individuals who work as one unit, with the common goal of being the absolute best. That blueprint could change professional wrestling.

Burkett: Before we move on to another topic, I've got to know: Whose idea was it to wear The Anderson Brothers' boots?

Wheeler: Probably four years ago, me and Dax were bouncing ideas off each other for new boots because he had a pair of boots that were "Dr. Death"-inspired and I loved them. I didn't want to steal his idea, so I stole from the Andersons instead. So, the first pair I had made were flat-black with gold and yellow soles. I was like, man, these are best boots I've ever owned.

Burkett: It seems like we're continuing a theme here. Dusty Rhodes was instrumental during your early years. What was his biggest contribution to your careers?



As The Revival, Wheeler and Harwood raised the stakes for tag team wrestling in WWE ... first in NXT, then on the main roster. The two men harbor "no ill will" toward the company, but simply felt it was time to move on.

Harwood: Dusty taught us promo ability. He said, "No disrespect to Hulk Hogan, because he made it work for himself, but you never want to be the screaming 'Hey, Brother!' promo"—just because that's what everyone associates professional wrestling promos with. He said, "You want to be conversational, you want to get on the level of the fans, whether you're a good guy or a bad guy." Instead of talking at you, we're talking with you. I'd been at the Performance Center for a week maybe, and me and Dax went together to my first-ever promo class. From that moment forward, Dusty insisted we shadow each other and that we did promos together every week. We know that not everybody was sold on us being a team, but Dusty was one of our biggest supporters and fought for us like nobody else did at that time.

Burkett: I believe one of you said that, up until now, NXT was your true legacy. Of course, that includes two NXT tag team titles and the big feud with DIY. What do you feel was your lasting influence there?

Harwood: To circle back to what you just said, that's what scared us the most in WWE. As proud as we were of NXT, we didn't want that to be the end of our legacy. We took WWE, a company that hadn't focused on tag team wrestling for the better part of 10 or 13 years at that point, and we made tag team wrestling a focus. If you look at mainstream WWE before 2016, it was a completely different product before we came along. In WWE tag team matches, you had two guys that would tag in and out and do their individual moves. Cash and I had a conversation before our first tag team match in NXT. We said we're never going to outshine each other. We're never going to be selfish. We're never going to be insecure. We're always going to make sure because we are friends. We're best friends now. We wanted to make sure we were the best working unit the company had ever seen. We changed the philosophy and psychology of tag team wrestling in the company and brought it back to what it should be.

Wheeler: All of a sudden, in 2016, I think we had maybe

eight of the top 25 matches in the company for that year, including NXT's Match of the Year. We weren't coming in and winning titles right away. We put in the work. But, like Dax said, NXT should have been the foundation, we didn't want that to be the culmination.

Burkett: You still had great accomplishments in WWE, multiple world tag team titles and shining on the biggest stage of all. But I can imagine how frustrating it was, because you've reached the pinnacle, but you feel like if you stay longer, then it'll be damaging to your careers. So, it's like a career vice that you were in?

Harwood: Yep, absolutely. I don't want anyone to listen to this or read this and think we have any ill will towards WWE. We might have been on the pre-show, but we were still in front of 80,000 people at WrestleMania. Also, we had a three-way at Fastlane, against Bobby Roode and Chad Gable and Ricochet and Aleister Black. That was the first time a tag team championship had been defended on pay-per-view in many, many months.

Wheeler: Yeah, not on a pre-show, but on the main card, in a year.

Harwood: That's right. We had chances to shine in a great feud with The New Day, side-by-side with Randy Orton. We had some sleeper matches as well, like one of my favorites with Dolph [Ziggler] and Drew McIntyre. There were a lot of things we are proud of from our WWE tenure, and there are a lot of things that came off as embarrassing that may have offset it. And you're exactly right, if we would have stayed there, the money would have been astronomical. But, after it was all said and done, we made the absolute right decision for our careers, for our lives, and for our families.

Wheeler: Complacency is the enemy of success. We didn't want to stay there and be complacent because, like you said, it's the pinnacle. It has been regarded as such for as long as I've been alive. But we weren't happy to be there and not contributing the way we wanted to contribute.

Harwood: There was a lot of stuff online saying we were complaining, crying, and whining. We never said a word about

it online. You can ask any of our coworkers, any of the guys that we worked with, because never once did we phone it in, never once did we complain, and never once did we cry. If that were the case, WWE would not have booked us in almost 160 matches in the year 2019. No other tag team, no other individual, worked the schedule that we worked that year. They knew we would deliver every night.

Burkett: Now you're both in AEW. I'd like to get each of your opinions on what you think the state of tag team wrestling is in the year 2020. Is it on the upswing?

Harwood: It's absolutely on the upswing. Just look at AEW's tag team roster alone. I haven't read the rest of your rankings, but I'd bet that half of your top 15 are AEW teams. And then you've got New Japan, WWE, Ring of Honor, MLW, and the NWA. There's so many places for tag teams to cultivate how they apply their craft. Hopefully we can have a hand in helping that upswing. We want to work with all these different tag teams and elevate them if we can and help change wrestling psychology a little bit. Obviously, we don't love the style that everybody does now. If we can work with guys like The Lucha Bros. and The Jurassic Express and stay true to ourselves and we all come out learning something from that, then the potential for tag team wrestling in 2020 and beyond is unreal.

Wheeler: Listen, not everybody's gonna love us. I don't have to be considered by every fan to be half of the greatest team on the planet. But, if our peers think that of us, if we're able to help them become even more successful than they are already, and if we can do something great for tag team wrestling, that's enough of a legacy for me. □

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW



You'll never catch FTR obsessing over high spots. But, given their penchant for telling stories (and winning matches), Harwood and Wheeler are clearly working to elevate the art of tag team wrestling.



THE FIRST EVER

PWI TAG TEAM

50

AFTER MORE THAN a decade of producing two annual lists celebrating the top wrestlers in the world, we've decided it's high time to complete the trilogy. And what better way to do that than by acknowledging the contributions of tag team specialists? The *PWI* "Tag Team 50" is a gender-inclusive ranking that focuses not only on in-ring achievements, but on the overall presentation and cohesion of the top tandems in the industry.

As with this year's "Women's 100" list, the evaluation period for the "Tag Team 50" is October 1, 2019, through September 30, 2020. The minimum activity requirements are 10

matches or four months of activity as a *team*. This means some tandems who have recently been successful—including WWE Women's tag champs Shayna Baszler & Nia Jax and Impact Wrestling's Motor City Machine Guns—do not appear on this list.

For the newly created "Tag Team 50," we have come up with a new set of criteria:

- **MOMENTUM**
- **WINS & LOSSES**
- **CHEMISTRY**
- **CREATIVITY**
- **ACTIVITY**
- **IT FACTOR**

The "Tag Team 50" was open primarily to duos, although factions and trios did rank where tag team

accomplishments were a significant part of a group's story over the last 12 months. The list was compiled based on feedback from the *PWI* staff, and the biographical entries were written by Al Castle, Kristen Ashly, Brian Solomon, and Jason McVeigh. For the top five teams, additional "Words of Praise" were offered up by an assortment of modern tag team stars and tag legends. We are grateful to those individuals for their involvement in this project.

Now that the formalities are out of the way, everyone get into your respective corners, hold onto your designated tag ropes, and get ready for the first annual *PWI* "Tag Team 50."

1 FTR

CASH WHEELER & DAX HARWOOD

YEARS TEAMING UP: 6

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

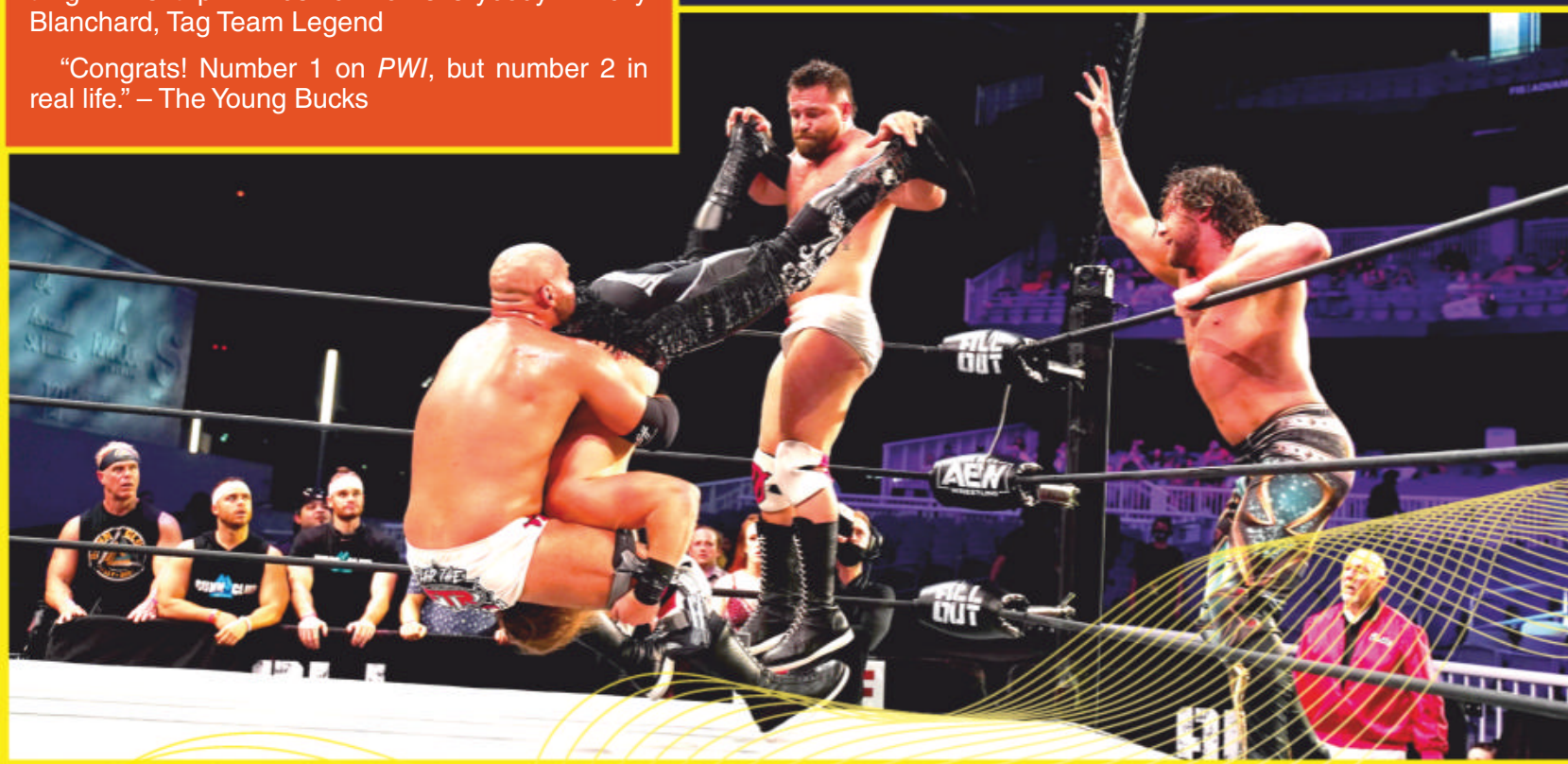


WORDS OF PRAISE:

"It took greatness to get me out of retirement. Dax and Cash are that greatness in tag team wrestling. The trip will be fun for everybody!" –Tully Blanchard, Tag Team Legend

"Congrats! Number 1 on PWI, but number 2 in real life." – The Young Bucks

Nobody's exactly sure what the letters stand for, but this much is for sure: FTR is the *Fifty's Top-Ranked team* ... Twelve-month evaluation period saw the former "Revival" members hold tag team gold both in WWE and AEW, where they are the reigning champions ... Picked up wins against the New Day and Curt Hawkins & Zack Ryder before leaving WWE in March ... Joined AEW in June, and, within three months, won the tag belts from Adam Page and Kenny Omega at All Out ... Have since scored victories over Jurassic Express and SCU ... Cerebral style is a throwback to some of the great tag teams of the Mid-Atlantic glory days, including The Midnight Express, whose members Wheeler and Harwood came to know coming up in the North Carolina independent scene ... Managed in AEW by another tag team legend, Tully Blanchard ... Admitted wrestling psychology junkies, FTR are less concerned with how flashy their move set is than they are with the timing, logic, and precision behind every punch they throw.



2 THE ELITE

KENNY OMEGA
& ADAM PAGE

COMBINED WEIGHT:
431 LBS.

One is an alcohol-fueled, Southern butt-kicker. The other is a milk-swilling wrestling virtuoso ... No, it's not "Stone Cold" Steve Austin & Kurt Angle circa 2001. It's The Elite ... Or, at least, it was The Elite ... The combustible union between Page and Omega was always expected to come to an ugly end. But while they were together, the duo elevated the art form in a stacked AEW tag team division ... Won the AEW tag team championship from SCU in January aboard a cruise ship, and then went on to hold it for nearly eight months ... Beat The Young Bucks at February's Revolution pay-per-view in what some called the best American tag team match in modern history ... Brewing tension grew out of Page feeling like the odd man out in the Elite stable, which includes AEW executive vice presidents Nick Jackson, Matt Jackson, Cody Rhodes, and Omega ... "Hangman" was finally booted from the group in August, and he and Omega lost their championship shortly afterward to FTR.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW



PHOTO BY WILL BYINGTON/AEW

WORDS OF PRAISE:

"I have to consider them the best tag team around at the time, because they defeated us. And being inaugural AEW tag team champions, we were THE team to beat. Kenny's body of work previous to that match speaks for itself. He had already solidified himself as one of the best. And even though they were an unlikely duo, I think that Adam Page in particular carried them through many great title defenses and cemented their status as a great tag team." —Frankie Kazarian

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



3

GOLDEN ROLE MODELS

BAYLEY & SASHA BANKS

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**COMBINED WEIGHT:
233 LBS.**



WORDS OF PRAISE:

"Sasha Banks and Bayley were a tag team made in Heaven for the women's division. They have such awesome chemistry, ability, and work so well together. Great characters and styles that really play off each other." —Jeff Hardy, 19-Time Tag Team Champion

WWE's hottest feud of the second half of 2020 began as its hottest tag team of the first half of 2020 ... After becoming the inaugural WWE Women's tag team champions in 2018, "The Boss 'n' Hug" Connection" was cut short after Banks took an extended leave from WWE to reevaluate her career ... Upon Banks' return late in 2019, the team reunited—both women sporting new, matching bad attitudes ... In June, the newly christened "Golden Role Models" recaptured the tag team title from Alexa Bliss and Nikki Cross ... So dominant were Bayley and Banks that, at one point, they held every women's championship on Raw and Smackdown ... Defended the tag title on both brands, as well as on NXT ... Underlying tension between the two women actually helped at times, as their individual egos would go to any length to keep from losing ... Inevitable split came soon after they lost their belts to Nia Jax & Shayna Baszler in August ... As much as fans clamored to see Bayley and Sasha do battle, here's hoping a Golden Role Models reunion is in the future.



4 THE NORTH

ETHAN PAGE &
JOSH ALEXANDER

YEARS TEAMING UP: 9

Impact Wrestling's roster may not be as deep as it was years ago, but the promotion led the way over the last year when it came to presenting a dominant championship tag team ... At an astounding 380 days, The North's run with the Impact tag belts was, by far, the longest in the company's 18-year history ... All but cleaned out the company's tag team division, beating teams like The Rascalz, Rich Swann & Willie Mack, and Sami Callihan & Ken Shamrock, before finally losing to the Motor City Machine Guns in July ... Undeterred, they regained the belts in a four-team match at Bound for Glory ... Over nearly a decade of teaming together, the former Monster Mafia have developed a kind of shorthand ring language that is a treat to watch ... Double-team tactics are as fluid as you'll find in wrestling, including their devastating Burning Hammer/spinebuster finisher ... Known as the "Walking Weapon," Alexander is an aggressive and gifted grappler, while Page is adept at strikes and trash talk.



WORDS OF PRAISE:

"The North are probably one of the most complete tag teams we have shared the ring with. Their mindsets, intensity, and chemistry are attributes that we loved to mix with ours and made something magical every time." —Dez, of Impact Wrestling's The Rascalz

"Instant chemistry. It's rare in wrestling to come in and see you're working guys and 1000% know the match is going to be a banger. And that's what we have with them. They deserve everything they've gotten, plus more. Also, genuinely great humans that have helped me get through hard times in my life." —Wentz, also of The Rascalz

PHOTOS BY BASIL MAHMUD/
IMPACT WRESTLING



5

STREET PROFITS

ANGELO DAWKINS & MONTEZ FORD

ENTRANCE MUSIC:
“BRING THE SWAG”
BY CFO\$ FEATURING J-FROST



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Sure, their rise to WWE tag team prominence has come during an era when fans aren't around to cheer them on, but we prefer to see the Street Profits' red Solo cups as half-full ... Seven-month reign as Raw tag team champions was the longest in the title's four-year history, and only ended because they were drafted to Smackdown, where they were instantly recognized as that brand's champions ... Careers got a big boost from former Raw creative head Paul Heyman, who took a liking to their act in NXT and recruited them to provide some backstage comic relief on Monday nights ... Beat Seth Rollins & Murphy for the Raw tag team championship in March ... Retained the title in multiple defenses, including against Angel Garza and Austin Theory at WrestleMania ... Other teams that have gone down in *smoke* include The Viking Raiders and Dolph Ziggler & Bobby Roode ... Both members have big upsides, but Ford's natural charisma and insane acrobatics are off the charts.

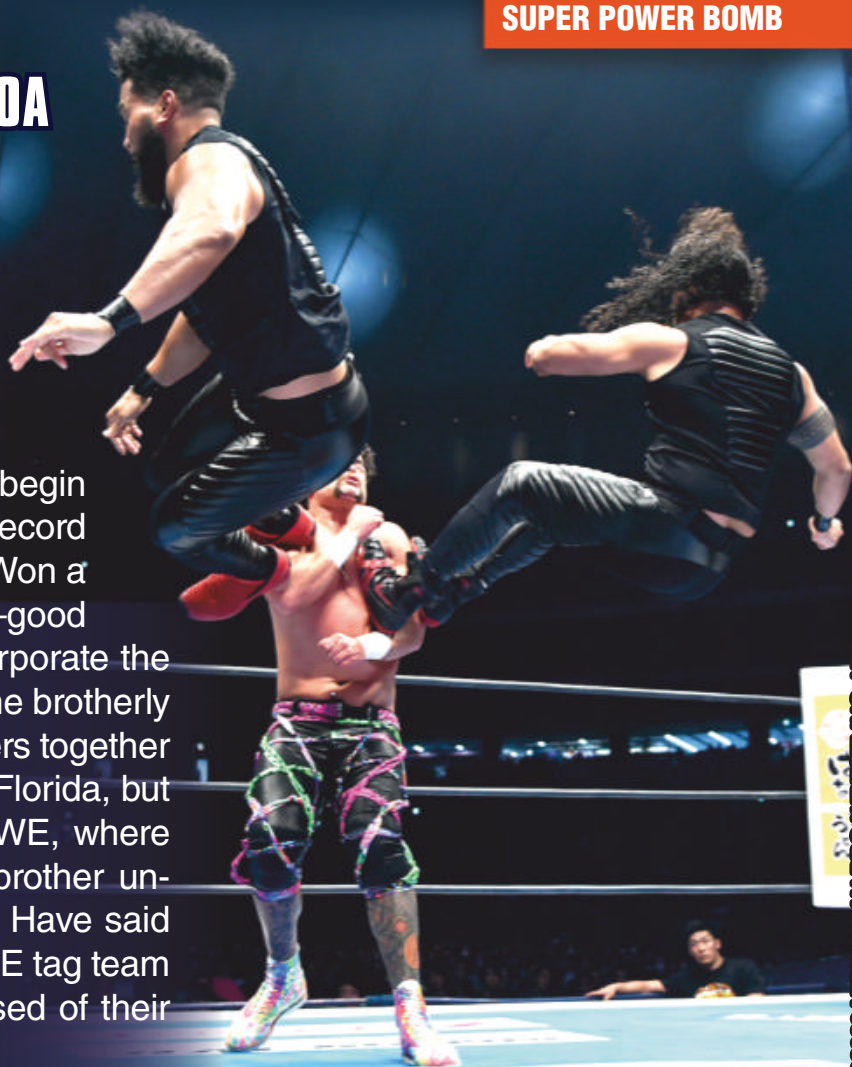
WORDS OF PRAISE:

"The Street Profits were destined to be a great tag team. Montez Ford is an extraordinary talent gifted in so many ways; Angelo Dawkins is one of the most persistent with a 'never quit' mentality. They are the heir apparent to Harlem Heat." —Booker T, Two-Time WWE Hall of Famer

6 GUERRILLAS OF DESTINY

TAMA TONGA & TANGA LOA

As the children of one of the toughest men in the sport's history—Tonga “Haku” Fifita—brothers Tama Tonga and Tanga Loa have a lot of work to do fill their father's shoes, but they're well on their way ... Wore the IWGP tag team title twice during the evaluation period, with their earlier reign lasting an impressive 315 days ... In February, beat FinJuice to begin their sixth IWGP championship reign, tying a record set by Hiroyoshi Tenzan and Satoshi Kojima ... Won a dozen matches in the 2019 World Tag League—good enough to place third in the tournament ... Incorporate the smash-mouth style of The Road Warriors and the brotherly synchronicity of The Usos ... Started their careers together in the Dudleys' Team 3D Wrestling Academy in Florida, but took divergent paths when Loa signed with WWE, where he worked as Camacho ... Reunited with his brother under the Bullet Club banner in NJPW in 2016 ... Have said their dream match would be against former WWE tag team champions “The Colossal Connection,” comprised of their dad, Haku, and Andre The Giant.



FINISHING MOVE:
SUPER POWER BOMB

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7 LUCHA BROS.

PENTAGON JR. & FENIX

COMBINED WEIGHT: 370 LBS.

The real-life siblings have run roughshod through multiple promotions on multiple continents, and, as of press time, wore tag team titles both in the U.S. (for the House of Glory promotion) and in Mexico's AAA ... But gold has eluded them so far in the promotion where American fans know them best, All Elite Wrestling ... Did get a few shots at the AEW tag title, including in the tournament final against SCU to crown the inaugural champions, and in February against Adam Page and Kenny Omega, but have always come up short ... Have picked up some important wins in AEW, including against the Best Friends and against Page & Omega in December ... “Death Triangle” alliance with PAC has been put on hold because of PAC's inability to enter the U.S. during the pandemic ... Bonded since birth, Pentagon and Fenix have been able to achieve considerable success on their own as singles competitors, then reunite as a tag team without missing a beat ... The fearless Pentagon brings the violence and the cool factor, while little brother Fenix delivers some of the most crisp, high-flying offense in the sport.

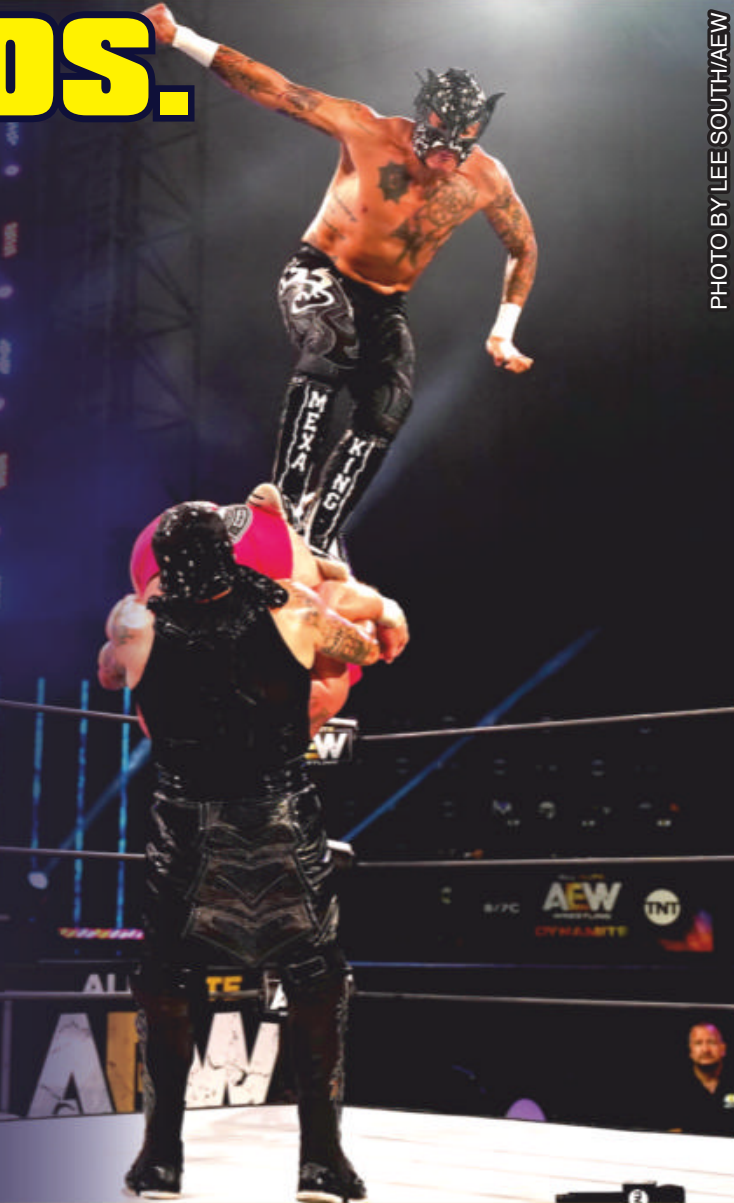


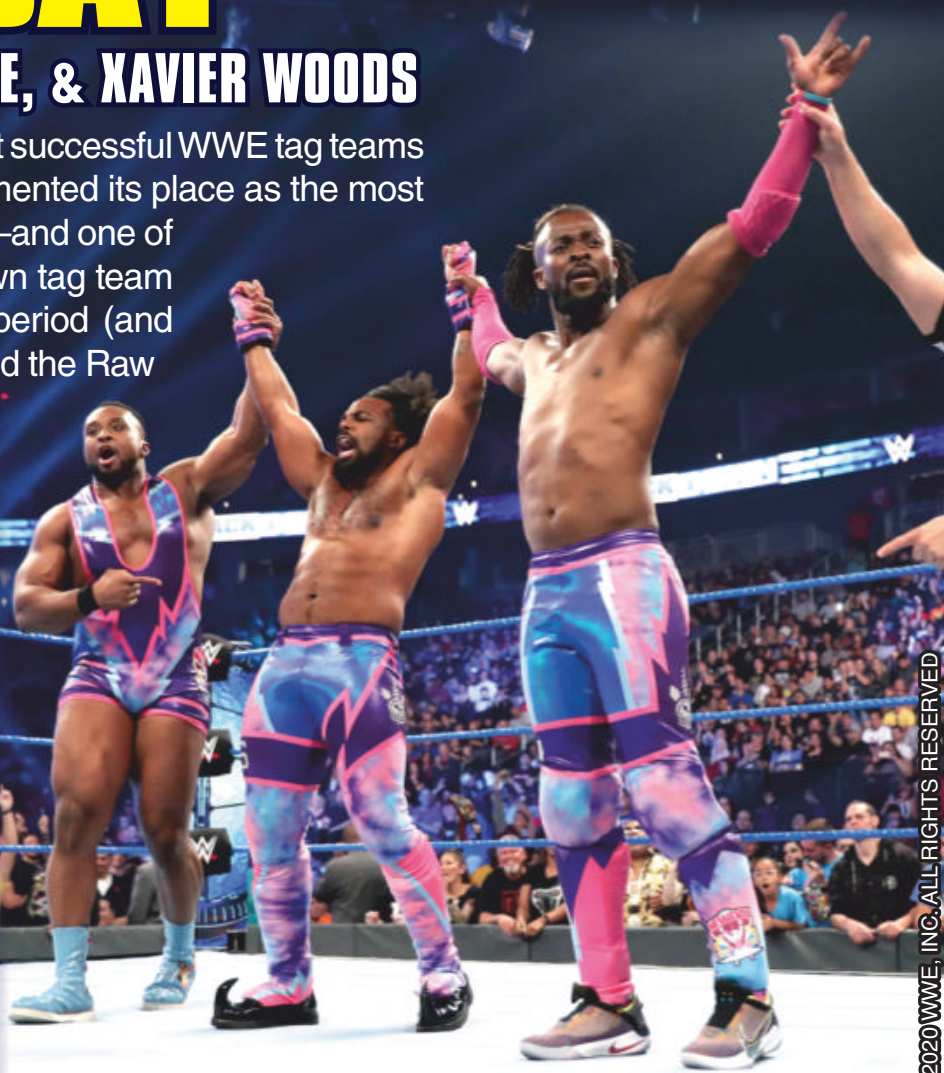
PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

8 NEW DAY

YEARS TEAMING UP: 6

KOFI KINGSTON, BIG E, & XAVIER WOODS

More than just one of the most successful WWE tag teams of the past 12 months, the New Day has cemented its place as the most successful WWE tag team of its generation—and one of the greatest in history ... Won the Smackdown tag team championship twice during the evaluation period (and one more time just after it) ... Were proclaimed the Raw tag team champions when they swapped places with Street Profits in the 2020 WWE Draft ... Ten WWE tag team championship reigns eclipses the previous record of eight held by the Dudley Boyz ... While some might take issue with a trio receiving the same consideration as duos, the so-called “Freebird Rule” has been well-established in the sport for decades ... What’s more, going forward, the New Day will be more of a traditional duo, as Big E stayed behind on Smackdown to focus on his singles career ... While the team might miss the power supplied by Big E, they should make up for it with the agility of Woods and veteran savvy of Kingston, a former world champion.



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9 KABUKI WARRIORS

ASUKA & KAIRI SANE

ENTRANCE MUSIC: “WARRIORS” BY DEF REBEL

They weren’t the first duo to hold the WWE Women’s tag team championship, but The Kabuki Warriors are considered by many the team that put the division on the map ... Formed their partnership under the guidance of Paige in April 2019 ... Defeated Alexa Bliss and Nikki Cross to win the belts at Hell in a Cell 2019, and held them for six months: the longest reign in the championship’s history ... Had multiple title defenses on all three WWE brands, including against Becky Lynch and Charlotte Flair in the main event of the 2019 TLC PPV, where they competed in the titular match ... Sane’s aerial skills combined with Asuka’s sheer brutality for a wall of offense that was difficult for opponents to penetrate ... The Kabuki Warriors disbanded in July, when a homesick Sane chose to step away from active competition in WWE, although she continues working as a talent scout in Japan ... Asuka, of course, returned to singles success, where she twice won the Raw Women’s championship.



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10 ROPPPONGI 3K

SHO & YOH

HOME PROMOTION: NEW JAPAN PRO-WRESTLING

R3K has been the team to beat in New Japan's juniors tag division over the last three years ... Held the junior heavyweight tag team championship on four different occasions for a combined 465 days ... Most recent reign began at January's Wrestle Kingdom event, where Sho and Yoh defeated El Phantasma and Taiji Ishimori ... Earned that title shot by winning their third consecutive Super Jr. Tag League tournament in November ... Successfully defended the championship twice in February—including against former manager Rocky Romero and Ryusuke Taguchi—before vacating the title because Yoh suffered a knee injury ... Duo began their careers as rivals, before matchmakers noticed their natural chemistry and paired them ... Honed their act with stints in Mexico's CMLL and in ROH, before returning to NJPW under the tutelage of Romero, who vowed the team was 3,000 times better than his former tag team with Trent, Roppongi Vice ... In the tradition of Japan's great junior tag teams, R3K are known to move around the ring with dazzling synergy and artistry, as evidenced by their "Strong X" package piledriver/top-rope foot stomp combination finisher.



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11 YOUNG BUCKS

MATT JACKSON & NICK JACKSON

SoCal brothers started wrestling together in 2004 ... Since 2006, only went 6 months total without wrestling one match ... Most known for their time in PWG, ROH, NJPW, TNA, and AEW ... Act as AEW executive vice presidents ... One of the most decorated tag teams in history, though won zero titles during evaluation period ... During the inaugural AEW *Dynamite*, teamed with Kenny Omega and lost to Chris Jericho, Santana, and Ortiz ... Defeated Santana & Ortiz in a highly touted street fight tag team match on *Dynamite* in December ... Eliminated by Private Party in a tournament to decide AEW's inaugural AEW World tag team champs ... Won a battle royal for the right to face Page and Omega for the belts at Revolution, but failed to take them home ... In March, Nick was given a kayfabe injury by The Inner Circle on *Dynamite* to take paternity leave for his third child ... Participated in the beloved "Stadium Stampede" at AEW Double or Nothing ... Challenged FTR for the championship, but Page interfered and cost the Bucks the bout, leading them to kick Page out of The Elite ... Superkicked Alex Marvez in September, turning heel in the process ... One of the most well-known and admired tag teams of the modern day.



SIGNATURE MOVE:
MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

12 VIOLENT GIANTS

SUWAMA & SHUJI ISHIKAWA

HOME PROMOTION: AJPW

Fearsome duo has become one of Japan's most dominant and respected tandems ... After only existing for 2 months as a tag team, they earned Tokyo Sports' Tag Team of the Year Award in 2017 due to their victory in the World's Strongest Tag Determination League ... Took home Tag Team of the Year honors again in 2018 and 2019 ... Won two-thirds of their matches during this evaluation period ... Managed to wrestle in 50 matches during those 12 months, even with the pandemic ... Have competed within AJPW for the majority of their existence ... Also participated in Machida Pro-Wrestling Festival Vol. 3 and won their match against Isami Kodaka and Yuko Miyamoto ... Appeared on WRESTLE-1's TV show, *W-1 Wonder Carnival*, with Shuji Kondo in a losing effort against Keiji Muto, Masaaki Mochizuki, and Zeus ... Four-time AJPW tag team champs, with their fourth reign falling squarely within the evaluation period (and lasting nearly a year) ... Match against Jake Lee and Naoya Nomura in AJPW Real World Tag League 2019 was one of their highest-rated ... Defended their title three times total during the evaluation period ... Double-team finishing move is the Last Mountain (a double-elevated crucifix powerbomb).



COURTESY OF ALL JAPAN PROWRESTLING

13 UNDISPUTED ERA

BOBBY FISH, KYLE O'REILLY, RODERICK STRONG, & ADAM COLE

Formed in 2017 ... First team to hold every male championship on the NXT brand ... Fish and O'Reilly were

COMBINED WEIGHT: 807 LBS.

honored as Tag Team of the Year in *PWI's* Achievement Awards, while Cole took home the top Wrestler of the Year prize ... Fish and O'Reilly reigned as NXT tag champs until February ... Had various feuds across various brands, battling the Street Profits, The Revival, Heavy Machinery, and New Day ... Fish and O'Reilly competed during the 2019 Survivor Series pre-show ... The faction lost to Dominik Dijakovic, Keith Lee, Kevin Owens, and Tommaso Ciampa at NXT TakeOver: WarGames III ... Beat Gallus in the first round of the Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic, but lost to Grizzled Young Veterans in the semi-final ... Dropped the NXT tag belts to The BroserWeights in February at NXT TakeOver: Portland ... Lost to Imperium at WWE Worlds Collide 2020 ... Attacked Imperium following WALTER's successful title defense against Joe Coffey at NXT UK TakeOver: Blackpool II ... Cole lost the NXT championship to Keith Lee in a winner-take-all match at the Great American Bash, ending his historic reign at 403 days ... Strong took part in a hilarious storyline with Dexter Lumis ... Cole ranked #2 on the 2020 *PWI* 500, while Strong ranked #29.



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14 NUEVA GENERACION DINAMITA

HOME PROMOTION: CMLL

EL CUATRERO, FORASTERO, & SANSON

Proof that blood is thicker than water, this family unit has taken lucha libre by storm ... Formed in 2015 and fighting primarily for CMLL ... Sanson and Cuatrero are brothers, sons of legendary Mexican retired professional wrestler Cien Caras, similarly best known for his time in Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre ... Forastero, their cousin, is also a second-generation professional wrestler and part of the Reyes family ... Won the Torneo de Parejas Familiares by defeating Los Guerreros Laguneros (Gran Guerrero & Ultimo Guerrero) by disqualification ... They have held the Mexican National Trios championship since 2017, but haven't defended the title in over a year and a half ... All three have participated in the Gran Alternativa Tournament, where a younger fighter faces an older and more experienced competitor ... Cuatrero is the current CMLL Middleweight champion, having won the title in Japan in 2018 from Angel de Oro at NJPW & CMLL's Fantastica Mania 2018 ... Best known for their high energy and electric two-out-of-three falls matches ... Were defeated by Caristico and Mistico in the tag team title match at Sin Piedad 2020 ... Won the CMLL Family Tag Tournament 2020 at Fantastica Mania 2020.



PHOTO BY BLACK TERRY/JR.

15 THE BRISCOES

JAY BRISCOE & MARK BRISCOE

HOME PROMOTION: RING OF HONOR

... 2000, making them one of the longest standing tandems in the U.S. ... Often referred to as "Dem Boys," in acknowledgement of their country appearance and demeanor ... Also adding to the gimmick is their entrance music, "Gimme Back My Bullets" by Lynyrd Skynyrd ... Are 11-time ROH tag team champions ... Lost the ROH tag belts in December to Jay Lethal & Jonathan Gresham at Final Battle 2019 ... The Briscoes tried unsuccessfully to regain their footing, taking a hard loss to 2 Guys 1 Tag (Josh Woods and Silas Young) ... Re-signed with ROH earlier this year ... One of the last established and recognized ROH tag teams left, making them a true staple of the company ... Have developed a reputation for having attitude and behavioral issues outside of the ring, which makes it difficult for some fans to get behind them ... Signature moves include the flashy Briscoe Bomb, Spike Jay-Driller, springboard Doomsday Device, and Redneck Boogie ... Returned to ROH tapings in August ... Only competed in five matches this year, most of their success happening in later 2019 ... If a team is going to succeed in Ring of Honor, they need to go through the Briscoes first.

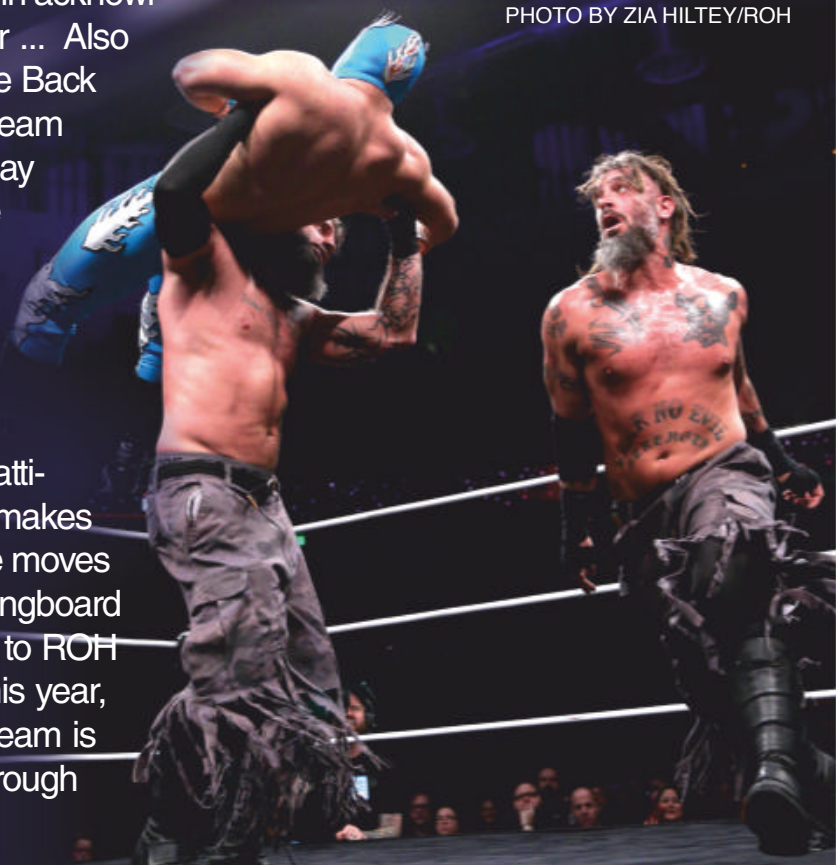


PHOTO BY ZIA HILTEY/ROH

16 PROUD AND POWERFUL SANTANA & ORTIZ

SIGNATURE MOVE: THE STREET SWEEPER

Debuted in AEW after thriving as LAX in Impact Wrestling ... Also wrestled for GCW, Beyond Wrestling, and PROGRESS ... Were considered two of the hottest free agents at the time, due to their no-nonsense style, in-ring acumen, and tag team chemistry ... Joined Chris Jericho, Sammy Guevara, and Jake Hager to form the The Inner Circle and have become a fixture of AEW programming ... After signing with AEW, the duo added a dash of comedy to their typical smash-mouth style ... And, upon joining the Inner Circle, played an integral part in the building of the group's feud with The Elite ... The rivalry culminated in the memorable "Stadium Stampede" match at Double or Nothing, where they tried to drown Matt Hardy ... Also had a bitter feud with the Best Friends, which evolved to include a MOTY candidate, the Parking Lot Brawl, Trent Beretta's mother, and her minivan ... Despite being on the losing side of things over the course of the evaluation period, their recent uptick of momentum during the Best Friends feud shows they have all the skills to be a top team ... Seems a question of when, not if, they will become AEW tag team champs.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

17 SCU CHRISTOPHER DANIELS, FRANKIE KAZARIAN, & SCORPIO SKY

Group has been together since 2017 ... Debuted in AEW after establishing themselves in ROH and the independent scene ... Trio of Southern California wrestlers known for their athleticism and high-flying style ... Sky and Kazarian won the AEW World Tag Team Tournament to become the inaugural AEW tag champs by defeating Best Friends in the first round, The Dark Order in the semi-final, and finally the Lucha Brothers in the final match in October on AEW *Dynamite* ... Shortly after, Christopher Daniels sustained an injury, forcing Sky and Kazarian to be the duo who defended the titles ... They lost the tag belts to Kenny Omega and Adam Page on the Jericho Cruise episode of *Dynamite* in January, only holding the title for 83 days ... They tried to regain the gold four separate times, including two #1 contendership matches, but failed ... Daniels was under suspicion as possibly being a member of The Dark Order for a time ... During the latter part of the evaluation period, AEW demonstrated an interest in pushing Scorpio Sky as a singles competitor, with Daniels and Kazarian taking up most of the work as a team ... Featured players on the YouTube series, *Being the Elite*.



HOME PROMOTION: AEW

PHOTO BY SCOTT LESH/AEW

18 RASCALZ

DEZMOND XAVIER, TREY MIGUEL, & ZACHARY WENTZ

Combined, they have 26 years of experience among them, with Miguel as the veteran, debuting in 2009 ... Have held the PWG tag team title for over 900 days ... Fixtures on Impact and the Midwest independent wrestling scene ... They made it to the finals of the Riptide Tag Team Tournament but lost to the Medusa Complex in October 2019 ... They lost the SWE tag team belts to The Deadly Sins (JK Moody & Kane Khan) in October 2019

... Faced Amazing Red and CHAOS at Warrior Wrestling 7, and Strong Hearts at Warrior Wrestling 8 ... Defeated XXXL and the team of Fallah Bahh & TJP in a three-way tag team match in April ... Challenged The North on an episode of *Impact Wrestling* in June ... Handpicked opponents of The Motor City Machine Guns at Slammiversary XVIII in July ... Despite all of them being active in singles matches as well, they truly shine when they work as a team ... A well-loved trio, their profile is on the rise ... All three men are on the younger side, leaving them plenty of time to shine ... Appreciated for their highly acrobatic, electrifying style.

FAVORITE HANGOUT SPOT: THE TREEHOUSE



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD

19 PRIVATE PARTY

ISIAH KASSIDY & MARQ QUEN

Came up through the indies, but now call AEW home ... In October, they upset The Young Bucks in the first round

HOME PROMOTION: AEW

of the AEW World tag title tourney, but lost in the semi-final to Lucha Bros. ... Won AEW World Tag Team Title Tournament Bronze Medal against Evil Uno and Stu Grayson of The Dark Order, but their overall luck stalled there ... Competed in nearly 30 episodes of weekly programming for AEW between *Dark* and *Dynamite* ... Lost to SCU at AEW Full Gear ... Competed in three matches on Jericho Cruise, losing to Santana & Ortiz and Jurassic Express, and teamed with Darby Allin to win against Jurassic Express ... Lost a tag team title #1 contendership match against Best Friends on The Buy-In pre-show at AEW Double or Nothing ... Lost a title challenge against Kenny Omega and Adam Page at Fyter Fest 2020 ... Despite not ranking in AEW's top six tag teams at the end of the evaluation period and having lost two-thirds of their matches with the promotion, the team nevertheless remains one of the most innovative, creative, and hungry duos on the roster.



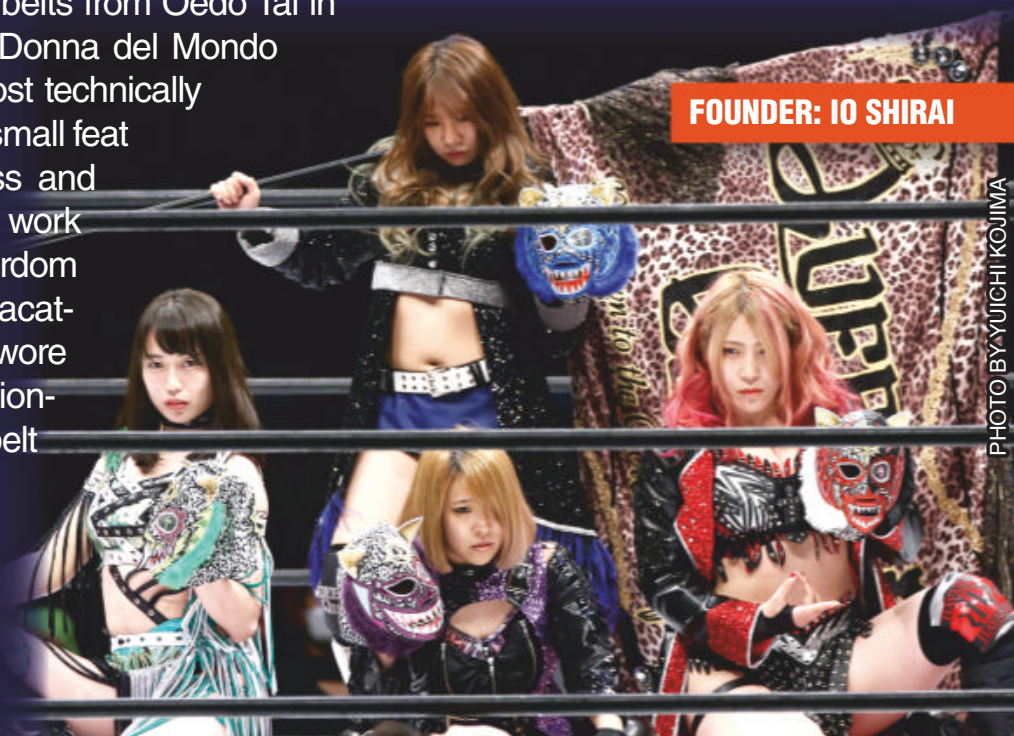
PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

20 QUEEN'S QUEST

MOMO WATANABE, UTAMI HAYASHISHITA,
AZM & SAYA KAMITANI

Extensive membership has included NXT Women's champion Io Shirai, HZK, and Piper Niven ... Cocky tweener-esque group now headed by Momo Watanabe, who gained leadership of the group after Shirai left to join WWE ... Demanded that others bow down before them ... Became the Goddesses of Stardom champs after Saya Kamitani and Utami Hayashishita defeated Tokyo Cyber Squad to win the vacant title in July ... Won the Artist of Stardom belts from Oedo Tai in November, but summarily lost them to Donna del Mondo in February ... Could possibly be the most technically superior faction in Stardom, which is no small feat

... Expectation of members is greatness and nothing less, which is reflected in their work ... Hayashishita held the Future of Stardom Championship for over 400 days before vacating it in February ... Hayashishita also wore the SWA Undisputed Women's championship for over a year, until she lost the belt to Jamie Hayter at Stardom's anniversary show in Osaka in January ... The Queen's Quest signature hand pose is a "Q" with a long tail, which actually began with founder Io Shirai's hand sign, which forms the letters "I, O."



FOUNDER: IO SHIRAI

PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA



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21 FINJUICE

DAVID FINLAY & JUICE ROBINSON

COMBINED WEIGHT: 429 LBS.

Finlay is the son of the legendary Fit Finlay, while Robinson is a former NXT and ROH competitor ... Mainstays in New Japan Pro-Wrestling, where they won the prestigious World Tag League tournament last December, edging out teams like EVIL & SANADA, Guerrillas of Destiny, and Minoru Suzuki & Lance Archer ... Ended the nearly 11-month IWGP tag team title reign of G.O.D. at the beginning of the year, but only held the belts one month before losing them back... The duo went their separate ways at the end of February, both focusing on singles competition for much of 2020.

23 GOLDEN ACE

KOTA IBUSHI & HIROSHI TANAHASHI

YEARS TEAMING UP: 1

Take two explosive and successful New Japan singles stars, put them together, and you've got one explosive and successful tag team ... Despite a heated rivalry in the past, Ibushi and Tanahashi always had supreme respect for each other ... First teamed in January at New Year Dash, joining FinJuice in a victorious effort against the Bullet Club faction of Guerrillas of Destiny and Bad Luck Fale & Chase Owens ... Enjoyed a five-month reign as IWGP tag team champions, taking the gold from G.O.D. in February in Atlanta... Lost the title in July to the Dangerous Tekkers.

24 THE ARTIST COLLECTIVE

CESARO, SAMI ZAYN, & SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

SIGNATURE MOVES: NEUTRALIZER (CESARO), HELLUVA KICK (ZAYN), KINSHASA (NAKAMURA)

This WWE faction was the brain-child of Sami Zayn while he was recuperating from injury ... Zayn has since taken a more active role, making this a true three-man team in the tradition of the Fabulous Freebirds and New Day ... Cesaro & Nakamura had a brief, though solid run as Smackdown tag champs this summer ... At Elimination Chamber, the team beat Braun Strowman in a 3-on-1 handicap bout, netting Zayn the Intercontinental championship ... At press time, Zayn was still I-C champ in his second reign.

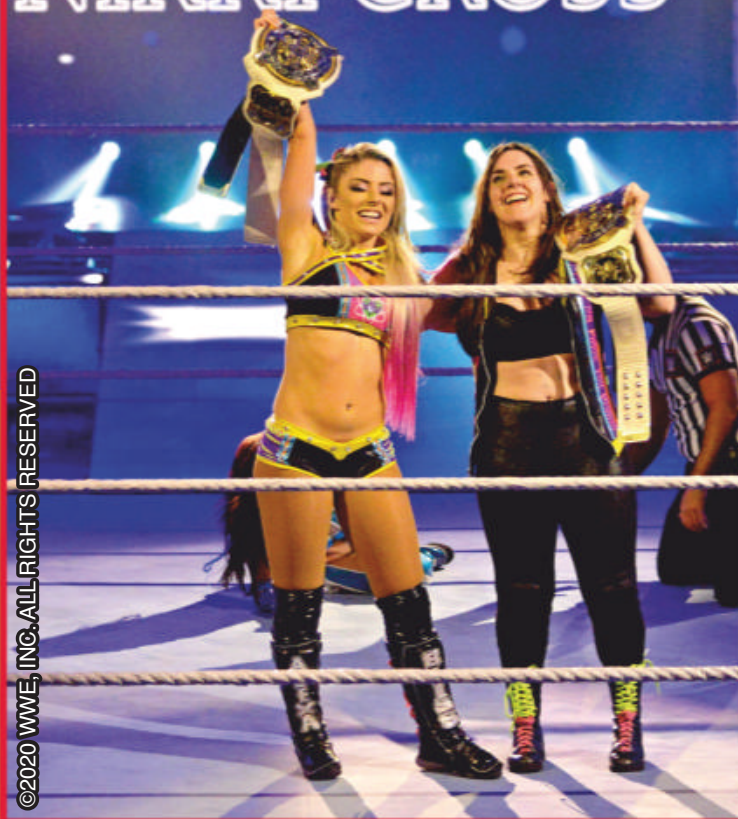


22 ALEXA BLISS & NIKKI CROSS

HOME PROMOTION: WWE (SMACKDOWN)

Not since the Glamour Girls tandem of Judy Martin and Leilani Kai back in 1988 has anyone done what Bliss and Cross did, namely capture the WWE Women's tag team championship twice ... The unlikely duo first took the gold from the liconics in a fatal four-way in August 2019 ... Held the title two months before losing to the Kabuki Warriors at Hell in a Cell ... Capped the Warriors' reign at under six months by regaining the straps at WrestleMania ... Held them another two months before losing to Bayley & Sasha Banks ... Bliss getting pulled into the orbit of "The Fiend" seems to have brought an end to this pairing.

ALEXA BLISS
NIKKI CROSS



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25 BEST FRIENDS

COMBINED WEIGHT:
406 LBS.

CHUCK TAYLOR & TRENT

Have been teaming together as far back as 2013, enjoying previous runs in PWG, Ring of Honor, and New Japan ... Since joining AEW in 2019, have been spending time with Orange Cassidy ... Lost a four-way match last January to determine the number-one contenders to the AEW World tag team title... Thanks to Cassidy's feud with Chris Jericho, got pulled into a war with The Inner Circle ... Eventually attained number-one contender status, but lost in their bid for the gold against Adam Page & Kenny Omega at Fyter Fest ... Defeated Santana & Ortiz in a highly acclaimed Parking Lot Brawl last September.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

26 TEAM SEA STARS

ASHLEY VOX & DELMI EXO

YEARS TEAMING UP: 5

RISE, SHIMMER, SHINE, ZERO-1, AWS, and GCW are just some of the places where fans have witnessed this indie tag team phenomenon in the past year alone ... Have been SHIMMER tag team champions for a full year, still holding the title at press time ... Successfully defended the title in October against the team of Marti Belle and former NWA Women's champion Allysin Kay ... At press time, have also held the Sabotage tag team title for a year and a half, and have been the inaugural tag team champs for New York-based Battle Club Pro since last January.

28 JINETES DEL AIRE

EL HIJO DEL VIKINGO, GOLDEN MAGIC, & MYZTEZIZ JR.

HOME PROMOTION: AAA

Six-man tag teams, or "trios," have been the heart and soul of *lucha libre* for decades, and carrying on that tradition today is this tandem of second-generation luchadores ... At press time, have been the AAA World Trios champions since August 2019, when they won the title in a three-way match at Triplemania XXVII in Mexico City ... Charismatic trio displays impressive athleticism and fighting spirit ... El Hijo del Vikingo & Myzteziz Jr. attempted to win the AAA World tag team title from the Lucha Bros. in a three-way match in December 2019.

27 THE MIZ & JOHN MORRISON

After 11 years apart, during which they each experienced breakout singles success, the former WWE World tag team champions reunited after Morrison returned to WWE at the start of 2020 ... Spent most of the year as part of Smackdown before being drafted to Raw in October ... Defeated New Day for the Smackdown tag team title at Super ShowDown in February ... Morrison successfully defended the gold at WrestleMania by himself when Miz was sidelined by an injury ... Lost the gold back to New Day in April ... After ill-fated feuds with Braun Strowman and Heavy Machinery, are trying their luck on the red brand.

ENTRANCE MUSIC: "HEY HEY"



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29 OEDO TAI

BEA PRIESTLEY & JAMIE HAYTER

YEARS TEAMING UP: 1

The Oedo Tai faction has existed for years in Japan's World Wonder Ring Stardom promotion, and the team of Priestley & Hayter has been one of its greatest combinations ... The two linked up in the Goddesses of Stardom Tag League in October 2019 ... After five victories, they were defeated in the finals of the tournament by DREAM SHiNE (Arisa Hoshiki & Tam Nakano) ... Won the Goddesses of Stardom title from Tokyo Cyber Squad in January and held it for six months ... Made an appearance in the U.K. for Revolution Pro last September, besting Aleah James & Gisele Shaw.



PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA

31 TOKYO CYBER SQUAD

JUNGLE KYONA & KONAMI

HOME PROMOTION: STARDOM

Entered our evaluation period as the reigning Goddesses of Stardom title holders and went on to have successful defenses against the likes of DREAM SHiNE and Riho & Starlight Kid ... Took on, and usually defeated, challengers from all around the world but ended up losing their belts to the international pairing of Bea Priestley and Jamie Hayter at the Stardom 9th Anniversary show in January ... Seemingly eternal war against the Oedo Tai faction came to a head in the fall in a losing effort that saw the Cyber Squad have to disband when Konami shockingly turned on her partner.



PHOTO BY YUICHI KOJIMA

30 DANGEROUS TEKKERS

TAICHI & ZACK SABRE JR.

HOME PROMOTION: NEW JAPAN

These Suzuki-Gun stablemates have teamed together as far back as 2018, but it was last summer when they first unofficially christened themselves "Dangerous Tekkers" and took the IWGP tag team championship from Kota Ibushi & Hiroshi Tanahashi (a.k.a. Golden Ace) at NJPW Dominion in Osaka... Successfully defended against former champs Ibushi & Tanahashi the following month at NJPW Summer Struggle in Tokyo... Regularly team with other Suzuki-Gun members like Minoru Suzuki and DOUKI ... Scored nine victories in the 2019 World Tag League, coming in fifth out the 16-team field ... Remain IWGP titleholders as of press time.

32 BESTIES IN THE WORLD

DAVEY VEGA & MAT FITCHETT

ENTRANCE THEME: "TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY" BY SAVAGE GARDEN

BFFs have been tearing up the independent scene since 2011, but the last twelve months may have been their best yet ... Entered our evaluation period in their third reign as AAW tag champs and also bagged doubles gold in Black Label Pro, where they defeated the odd couple of Ethan Page and Danhausen to lift the straps ... Biggest career win to date came at EVOLVE 141, where they defeated AR Fox and Leon Ruff to become what could be the last ever EVOLVE tag team champions ... Still have one of the best entrances in the business.

33 GOOD BROTHERS

DOC GALLOWES & KARL ANDERSON

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

COMBINED WEIGHT: 517 LBS.

Three-time IWGP tag team champions never quite reached the same heights in WWE ... Spent the latter part of 2019 losing to the Viking Raiders on television and house shows and began 2020 with a two-on-one handicap match loss to Drew McIntyre on the January 27 Raw ... Last WWE appearance was running interference for OC pal AJ Styles against The Undertaker in the Boneyard Match at WrestleMania ... After being released by WWE, arrived in Impact Wrestling at Slammiversary to great fanfare and brighter prospects ... Expect a return to Japan to be in their future when travel allows.



34 AXIZ

GO SHIOZAKI & KATSUHIKO NAKAJIMA

HOME PROMOTION: NOAH

Japanese veterans' prolific third reign as GHC tag team champions lasted for 192 days and saw them rack up title and non-title victories over some of the best Pro Wrestling NOAH had to offer ... Lost the belts on January 5 in Korakuen Hall to Masaaki Mochizuki and Naomichi Marufuji but quickly re-established themselves by going on a tear and reaching the finals of the Global Tag League in the spring ... Singles success enjoyed by Shiozaki throughout the year clearly created resentment on Nakajima's behalf, which led to the team splintering in the summer.

35 VIKING RAIDERS

SIGNATURE MOVE: VIKING EXPERIENCE

ERIK & IVAR

Raised the Raw tag team straps on October 14 in a victory over Dolph Ziggler & Bobby Roode and went on to hold them for the next three months ... Did the Raw brand proud by defeating Smackdown's New Day and NXT's Undisputed Era in a tri-brand tag team match on the Survivor Series Kickoff Show ... Competitive rivalry with the Street Profits saw the teams clash both in the ring and in a series of games outside of it that forged a respect between the two and firmly established Ivar as the ladies' man of the Raiders.

36

JAY LETHAL & JONATHAN GRESHAM

HOME PROMOTION: RING OF HONOR

Former singles stars ended our evaluation period as ROH tag team champions after defeating the Briscoes at Final Battle 2019 to raise the belts ... Successfully defended against the team of Josh Woods and Silas Young in February and then defeated Bandido and Ray Horus in a non-title match before the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to ROH proceedings ... Confident technicians are a threat to singles gold, as well, as is evidenced by both men entering themselves in the tournament to crown a new ROH Pure champion, but they need to be wary of neglecting their tag team responsibilities.



PHOTO BY ZIA HILTEY/RING OF HONOR

37 GALLUS

MARK COFFEY & WOLFGANG

Glaswegian grapplers spent virtually all of our evaluation period as NXT U.K. tag team champions

after defeating South Wales Subculture to begin their reign last October ... Saw off challenges from Imperium, South Wales Subculture, and the Grizzled Young Veterans in subsequent bouts, including a win over all three teams in a ladder match at TakeOver: Blackpool II ... United States excursion saw them fall to The Undisputed Era in the first round of the 2020 Dusty Rhodes Classic ... COVID-19 forced hiatus of NXT U.K. no doubt helped lengthen their reign as champions, but when active they were a winning team.

NAME MEANING: "GALLUS" IS SCOTTISH SLANG MEANING BOLD AND DARING

40 THE ROCK 'N' ROLL EXPRESS

RICKY MORTON & ROBERT GIBSON

DEBUT: 1983

Ageless trailblazers turned back the hands of time by winning their eighth NWA tag team championship on the December 3 episode of NWA *Powerrrr*, defeating The Wild Cards ... Lost the belts at the Hard Times PPV the following month to James Storm and Eli Drake ... They put up a spirited fight that must have caught the attention of New Japan Pro-Wrestling, who invited the veterans to compete on their tour of the U.S. in January and February ... Also made non-wrestling appearances in AEW on different occasions and usually found themselves involved in a scuffle in the process.

38 DARK ORDER

EVIL UNO & STU GRAYSON

WEBSITE: WWW.JOINDARKORDER.COM

Brought their sinister side to a global stage in AEW and have been wreaking havoc on its tag team scene ever since ... Reached the semi-finals of the AEW tag team title tournament, where they fell to eventual winners SCU ... Scored televised victories over Jurassic Express and Strong Hearts but failed to get back into title contention while SCU were champs ... Did manage to get a shot at Adam Page & Kenny Omega during The Elite members' title reign but couldn't manage to wrestle away the gold ... Their "Fatality" finisher has the ability to put away any team in AEW.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

39 THE VON ERICHS

ROSS & MARSHALL VON ERICH

SIGNATURE MOVE: THE IRON CLAW

Third-generation brothers are carrying on the family legacy in MLW where they defeated Dynasty members MJF and Richard Holliday to win tag team gold at the Saturday Night SuperFight PPV ... Bested Dynasty in a rematch on MLW *Fusion* and also scored a win over former Spirit Squad members Kenny and Mikey ... Found themselves embroiled in a bitter war with Tom Lawlor and his Team Filthy associates, which only cooled down because of the COVID-19 restrictions that halted MLW events ... Highly athletic duo are adding a bright new chapter to their family's often tragic story.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

41 IMPERIUM

MARCEL BARTHEL & FABIAN AICHNER

NATIONALITIES:
GERMAN &
ITALIAN

Split time between NXT and NXT U.K. and even found time to make an appearance on the November 8 *Raw* in Manchester, England, as part of an eight-man tag ... Reached the semi-finals of the Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic, where they fell to eventual winners The BroserWeights, but were emboldened enough to focus their energies entirely on NXT ... This worked out well, as they were quickly able to raise the NXT tag belts on May 13 ... Dropped the title in August to Breezango but remain a threat to tag championships on either side of the Atlantic.

43 MEDUSA COMPLEX

CHARLI EVANS & MILLIE MCKENZIE

ENTRANCE THEME:
"LIVING DEAD GIRL"
BY ROB ZOMBIE

Kicked off our evaluation period by winning the Riptide Tag Team Tournament, defeating The Rascalz in the final in what was a very impressive showing ... Traveled to Japan to defend their Sendai Girls tag title but lost to DASH Chisako and Hiroyo Matsumoto ... Started 2020 in a more positive fashion by defeating The Woke Queens and Gisele Shaw & Sammii Jayne in a three-way elimination match to become the Pro Wrestling EVE tag team champs at the Wrestle Queendom 3 PPV ... Were set for a big 2020 before COVID-19 shut down the BritWres scene.



PHOTO BY ROB BRAZIER

42 GYM

NASTY BOYZ

TIMMY LOU RETTON & WHITE MIKE

YEARS TEAMING: 3

Fun-loving duo held no less than four different tag team championships during our evaluation period and have cemented their status as one of the hottest teams on the independent scene ... Willingness to take on competitors of all experiences, genders, and species saw them across the ring at different times from the likes of Tommy Dreamer, Trish Adora, and Space Monkey ... Made wrestling legend George South an honorary member of their team at Colby Corino's Backyard Birthday Brawl in a loss to The Ugly Ducklings ... As charismatic as any team in wrestling right now.



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD

44 BREEZANGO

TYLER BREEZE & FANDANGO

SIGNATURE MOVE:
SUPERMODEL KICK
INTO FALCON ARROW

Veteran underdogs have found a rebirth on Wednesday nights in NXT ... Were embroiled in a feud with The Forgotten Sons before Fandango was sidelined by Tommy John surgery, which put the team on hold until the summer of 2020 ... Return to action saw them win a triple-threat match against Danny Burch & Oney Lorcan and Legado Del Fantasma on the TakeOver XXX pre-show to become number-one contenders to the NXT tag team title ... Defeated Imperium for the belts four days later ... Still likely to judge your taste in fashion on any given occasion.

45 PRETTY BASTARDS

MAGGOT & PRINCE AHURA

wXw Academy graduates raised their profile (along with the wXw tag title belts) by winning the 2019 World Tag Team Festival in Oberhausen, Germany, in a three-way elimination match that also involved current NXT tag champs Oney Lorcan & Danny Burch ... Went on a successful five-month title reign, defeating the best teams in their home promotion, including The Arrows of Hungary in a brutal TLC match in Frankfurt on November 9 ... Eventually fell to the team of Absolute Andy and Jay Skillet but regained the title in July ... Closed out our evaluation period as champs.

HOME PROMOTION: WESTSIDE XTREME WRESTLING



PHOTO BY THE RINGSIDE PERSPECTIVE

46 YANKEE TWO KENJU

PREVIOUS NAME:
DEATHMATCH
NICHOKENJU

ISAMI KODAKA & YUKO MIYAMOTO

Hardcore warriors showed their versatility with success in two very different Japanese promotions ... Stayed true to their roots by continuing to compete in a variety of violent matches in Big Japan Pro Wrestling and reached the semi-finals of the Saikyou Tag Team Tournament there ... BJPW highlight may have been their victory in the frightening "Human Meat Slice Barricade and Alpha Death Match" in July ... Biggest career win, however, was over Jake Lee and Koji Iwamoto that saw the duo lift the All-Asia tag team championship in All Japan Pro Wrestling, beginning an impressive 145-day reign.

47 VIOLENCE IS FOREVER

COMBINED
WEIGHT:
408 LBS

DOMINIC GARRINI & KEVIN KU

Black Label Pro badasses traveled to Germany to compete in the wXw World Tag Team Festival but crashed out in the first round ... Fared better on home soil, especially in BLP where they outworked The Workhorsesmen duo of Anthony Henry & JD Drake in a 30-minute iron man match ... Held the Southern Underground Pro tag title throughout our evaluation period and popped up in Beyond Wrestling and Game Changer Wrestling on occasion ... Garrini's jiu-jitsu background meshes well with Ku's rough and rugged attitude, and both are poised to potentially make a splash in MLW this year.

48 LOS TRAUMAS

TRAUMA I & TRAUMA II

YEARS TEAMING: 18

Enigmatic brothers have freelanced their way across the Mexican independent scene to much success ... Defeated AAA stars Murder Clown and Psycho Clown on a joint AAA/Lucha Libre Elite show but came up short on an IWRG show to another pair of brothers in Pentagon Jr. and Rey Fenix ... Rebounded to reach the final of the IWRG Intercontinental tag team title tournament but were denied the win and the belts ... Gold did not elude them long, however, as they became The Crash tag team champions on February 2, defeating La Rebelion Amarilla and Oraculo & El Mesias in a three-way cage match.

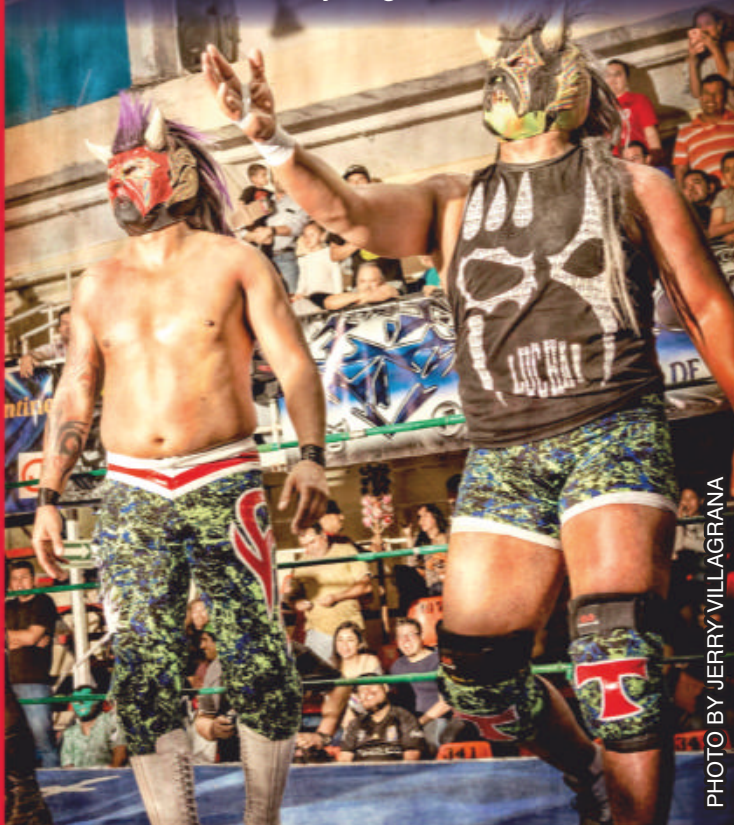


PHOTO BY JERRY VILLAGRANA

49 THE BRAT PACK

NATIONALITY:
AUSTRALIAN

MITCH WATERMAN & NICK BURY

Four-time Melbourne City Wrestling tag team champions blend youth, energy, and arrogance into an impressive cocktail ... Defeated Kyle Fletcher & Will Ospreay on night two of MCW's 9th Anniversary show before traveling to the U.K. for a tour with Ring of Honor ... Lost to Lifeblood and The Briscoes on that tour but were able to expose their talents to a new audience, which has to bode well for their future prospects ... Returned to Australia, where they continued to dominate and finished out our evaluation period with the MCW tag belts still firmly in their grasp.



PHOTO BY NEW PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS

50 THE II CONICS

BILLIE KAY & PEYTON ROYCE

NATIONALITY:
AUSTRALIAN

Disappeared from television at the end of 2019 and didn't fare too well upon returning in the spring ... Picked up a non-title victory over Alexa Bliss & Nikki Cross on the May 11 *Raw* but failed to dethrone the champions in a title rematch ... Feud with The Riott Squad proved to be the Aussies' undoing as they fell in an August 31 *Raw* match with the stipulation that the losing team had to split up ... While the duo may officially be no more, making it from the halls of your high school to the stage of WrestleMania together is still pretty iconic.

REMEMBER THEM?



Long before they were enigmatic, many years before they became "broken," Jeff and Matt Hardy were simply two kids from North Carolina with a dream of making it big in professional wrestling.

POINT-COUNTERPOINT

AEW'S TAG TEAM DIVISION IS THE BEST IN DECADES

By Brian Solomon

FANS OF TAG team wrestling cling to their so-called “Golden Ages.” Often, it’s a generational thing. If you’re a baby boomer, you might wax nostalgic about the glory days of the late 1950s, when teams like Antonino Rocca & Miguel Perez, The Fargo Brothers, The Fabulous Kangaroos, and The Golden Grahams ruled the roost. For Gen-Xers like me, there was the unforgettable mid-to-late-1980s, when we thrilled to The Midnight Express, The Hart Foundation, The Road Warriors, The Rock ‘n’ Roll Express, and many others. For my millennial friends, it’s all about the early-2000s heyday of Edge & Christian, the Hardy Boyz, the Dudleys, and the APA.

All those eras could be pointed to as shining moments in tag team wrestling history. And I would submit that we’re living through another one right now, thanks to the powers that be at All Elite Wrestling. In fact, I would say—and I admit to my own personal bias here—that the current AEW tag team division is the finest the sport has seen since the incredible bumper crop of tandems produced by the WWF, Jim Crockett Promotions, the AWA, and others back in the “Big ‘80s.” It’s an embarrassment of riches for tag team aficionados, and one we’ll be looking back on fondly in years to come.

The pleasantly surprising Joey Janela & Sonny Kiss. The excitement and cockiness of Private Party. The Dark Order’s Evil Uno & Stu “Don’t Call Me Dick” Grayson. The amazing Jurassic Express, major stars from the second they walked in the door. The brute force of The Butcher and The Blade. The offbeat but lovable Best Friends. SoCal Uncensored—especially the Scorpio Sky/Frankie Kazarian pairing, AEW’s first tag team champions. Santana & Ortiz, the muscle of The Inner Circle. The incredible athleticism of the Lucha Bros. The classic, old-school

duo of FTR, saved from WWE oblivion. And of course, the ever-present Young Bucks, pegged by many as the best team in the business today.

The fact that all these tag teams—and more!—are present in one company at the same time is, in and of itself, something to marvel at. Clearly, this was done on purpose, as it seems that stacking a supremely impressive tag team division was among Tony Khan’s top objectives from the beginning. Well, he’s done it in spades. Purists may bemoan the lack of tag ropes (well, except



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

Citing memorable showdowns between the likes of The Young Bucks and Lucha Bros., Brian Solomon feels AEW has assembled the greatest tag team division we’ve seen in decades.

for FTR matches), and the lax attitude of referees when it comes to enforcing certain rules, but there's no denying that tag team action is, almost without fail, the highlight of any AEW show. Matches like Lucha Bros. vs. "Hangman" Adam Page & Kenny Omega and the Young Bucks' challenge of Page & Omega for the title back at Revolution are modern classics, and have helped to quickly elevate the AEW tag team title into the most coveted tag prize in the sport.

It's a great time to be a tag team wrestling fan. And that's something I haven't been able to say with this much confidence in years.

AEW'S TAG DIVISION HASN'T LIVED UP TO ITS POTENTIAL

By Righteous Reg

YES, IT IS true: AEW has a super stacked tag team division. Like Brian said, maybe the best roster of all time. But does AEW actually have too much of a good thing? Who knew that having a company based on tag team wrestling would leave some of the best tag teams in the world with not much to do? In my opinion, AEW has had a couple of missteps when it comes to its own tag team division—mainly having a makeshift tag team carry the tag team championship for more than a year. When you have The Young Bucks, Best Friends, Private Party, Santana & Ortiz, and The Lucha Bros. all at your disposal, ready to build this division, but most of the teams are put in eight-man tag matches the whole year ... could the division be too stacked for its own good?

I think the tag belts and the division should have been built on the backs of the greatest tag team

Righteous Reg thinks AEW's tag division isn't quite there yet, arguing that tried-and-true teams like The Young Bucks and Santana & Ortiz should have been in the title picture from the get-go.



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/AEW

not just in AEW but, in my opinion, of all time: The Young Bucks. Now, I understand why they did what they did and what they were going for, but was that really the right decision? The Young Bucks have some of the greatest matches of all time already in AEW. Now, imagine if they were tag champs the whole time to really cement them. You have tag teams who were at the top of other promotions—mainly Santana & Ortiz and The Lucha Bros.—who have had some incredible matches along the way, but should have been the main contenders for the belts this entire time. Young tag teams like Private Party and Jurassic Express have made their names on national TV with mind-blowing moves and matches but, again, have mostly been in eight-man tags or other matches not focused on the championship. With FTR coming right in and winning the belts, deservedly so, it really kind of put a damper on all the tag teams that have been busting their butts for the first year of *Dynamite*. It's leading to the eventual dream match of the Bucks vs. FTR, but it really hammers home the reality of too much good stuff.

With all of this comes a question I have had: Could AEW have secondary tag team belts? It hasn't been done very often in modern pro wrestling. But, with the focus so much on tag teams, could AEW be the promotion to implement this concept? Perhaps the TNT tag team championship? Might be far-fetched and too convoluted, but, with a stacked division like this, it's an idea. Numerous times throughout the first year of AEW *Dynamite*, I have been in agreement with Brian. This might be one of the best tag team divisions of all time. Some of the matches AEW has put on have blown my mind and had me out of my seat at home. Matches like Private Party vs. The Young Bucks, Best Friends vs. Santana & Ortiz in a Parking Lot Brawl, and Young Bucks vs. Lucha Bros. in an insane ladder match are some of the best ever. So, going forward, it really is just a question of how they can maximize all these great tag teams. I would like to see more straight up two-on-two tag matches. And I hope with the time they have on television, AEW finds a way to continue to spotlight all these teams. □

12 QUESTIONS

with JORDAN BLADE & EEL O'NEAL

You're given the chance to interview your favorite wrestler. What questions are you dying to ask them? What would you never *think* to ask? We offer a bit of both in this reboot of a classic *PWI* feature.

1 WHO ARE THE KINGS OF THE DISTRICT, AND WHAT DO THEY STAND FOR?

JB: The Kings are a team with great pride in our District and professional wrestling. And I say professional wrestling in the sense that we have a deep appreciation and admiration for pure and technical wrestling. On the surface, we're an intergender tag team. But we stand for equality most of all.

EO: Jordan is the power wrestler and I'm the speed guy. J is a power lifter and Brazilian jiu-jitsu practitioner, I was a two-sport athlete in high school (football and Greco-Roman wrestling) and a lifelong *karateka*. Get in the ring with Jordan. You'll see she's a legit tough guy. Get in the ring with me, and you'll end up dizzy.

2 WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A TEAM?

JB: I helped him out after his match with Francis Kip Stevens. Stevens wanted to try to take liberties in the ring with Eel, and, well, we're from the "Grapitol Region." You don't take liberties in the District on the boys who are from here.

3 BE HONEST: WHICH ONE OF YOU IS MORE LIKELY TO MISS THE HOT TAG DURING A MATCH?

EO: Me. I get out in front of these people and lose my mind.

4 DO YOU HAVE ANY PRE-MATCH RITUALS?

JB: We gas each other up, try to get hype. I personally have a prolonged

stretch and mobility session before doors open. After two major surgeries, I can't just hop in the ring anymore.

5 WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SNACK FOR AFTER A MATCH/WORKOUT?

EO: Cheeseburger after. Eat light and easy before.

JB: What every gym bro would say: a protein shake.

6 WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT WRESTLING IN "THE GRAPITOL REGION"?

EO: The people. Washington D.C. was and still is wrestling-starved. Watching a community form around us, our friends, and competitors has been remarkable.

JB: D.C. has some of the most diverse fans I've ever been in front of. You could have a lifelong fan sitting next to someone attending their first show. We have multi-cultural and various gendered and non-gendered people sitting in the crowd enjoying something that brought us all together. It's magical.

7 BACK WHEN YOU WERE "JUST A FAN," WHO WAS YOUR FAVORITE TEAM TO WATCH?

JB: Team Extreme. Lita especially captivated me because her look was different than any other Diva at that time. Plus, she looked like a chick that would be cool to grab a beer with. Yes, I was thinking about grabbing beers with chicks at 12 years old. Glad to see nothing has changed!

EO: World's Greatest Tag Team (Charlie Haas & Shelton Benjamin). Some folks are Hardy Boyz stans, some folks are Edge and Christian guys. Me, you couldn't tell me WGTT shouldn't have ruled the wrestling world.

8 IF YOU COULD FACE A TEAM FROM ANY PROMOTION ON EARTH, WHAT TEAM WOULD THAT BE?

JB: If I'm just picking one team, it would be Dominic Garrini and Kevin Ku. They would test us for sure.

9 WHAT DO YOU LISTEN TO WHEN TRAVELING TO SHOWS?

EO: Hip-hop and showtunes. Modern day musicals. Classics all have kind of a flat and tinny feeling. Modern musicals drive.

10 WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH AWAY FROM THE RING IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

EO: Get a house. Get a pitbull. Probably make a little "Electric One" to carry on the legacy.

JB: I would like to get my master's degree in Exercise Science. My wife and I also want to have another kid at some point. I would like to do more powerlifting competitions and compete in an IBJJF tournament.

11 IF OUR READERS WANT TO LOOK UP ONE OF YOUR MATCHES, WHAT SHOULD THEY CHECK OUT FIRST?

KOTD: Us vs. Bird and The Bee vs. Ariela Nyx and Logan Black at PTPW's Butch vs. Gore.

12 WHEN THIS MAGAZINE HITS NEWSSTANDS, WE'LL BE DEEP IN THE THROES OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON. ANY LAST-MINUTE GIFT IDEAS?

EO: I get incredibly anxious when it comes to giving gifts, so *money*. Give money and a heartfelt note. It will get you far! ■

THE KINGS OF THE DISTRICT

EEL O'NEAL &
JORDAN BLADE



PHOTO BY JAYLEE PHOTOGRAPHY



THEY'VE GOT

THE MOTOR CITY RETURN

TEXT BY

Together and apart, Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin have thrilled fans all over the world. Now, a solid decade after their heyday, they've returned to Impact Wrestling to do battle with the next generation of tag teams.

PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

IN MANY WAYS, July's Slammiversary marked a new era for Impact Wrestling, and, with it, another chapter for the Motor City Machine Guns. Social media was abuzz when Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin reunited for the first time in more than two years to answer the challenge of The Rascalz. The Guns were blazing, not missing a beat with an impressive victory over Zachary Wentz and Dezmond Xavier—emerging talent one could argue were inspired by Shelley and Sabin's seamless synchronicity, which helped set the tone for today's fast-paced and athletic style. There may not have been physical fans in attendance in the Nashville studio. However, the energy was palpable from afar with fans expressing their excitement while watching at home.

Sabin and Shelley's respective Twitter timelines were jam-packed with support. A feel-good moment in a year filled with so much tragedy and heartbreak in the world. The team was trending, helping celebrate and kick off one of Impact's biggest nights of the year. A fitting moment, considering Sabin and Shelley were an important part of the company over the course of its more than 18 years in business.

Days later, the popular duo saw their hot streak continue, as they ended the historic tag team title reign of The North's Ethan

STILL IT

MACHINE GUNS HOME

SCOTT FISHMAN

Page and Josh Alexander. It was the MCMGs' first championship victory under the promotion's umbrella in more than a decade; another accolade for one of the most decorated twosomes of these modern times. They've captured gold in Impact and in other top companies like New Japan Pro Wrestling and Ring of Honor. Shelley and Sabin were also named *PWI* Tag Team of the Year in 2010.

"Winning the title was awesome. At the same time, I know for me personally, it felt good to go toe-to-toe with The North because they'd been a staple of this company for so long," Shelley said. "They are one of the best tag teams in the world. To show we can still go at that level was a test for us, and one we passed with flying colors."

The North did reclaim the gold in October at Bound for Glory in a fatal four-way. However, the setback didn't take away from what the Machine Guns achieved in a short span. Sabin, who also works as an Impact producer, recalled speaking with Co-Executive Vice President Scott D'Amore



Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin are handed the Impact tag team straps after defeating The North in late-July—a raw, emotional moment for the reunited Motor City Machine Guns.

PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/IMPACT WRESTLING

Shelley and Sabin send Super Eric (Eric Young) for a ride during the six-team cage match at Lockdown 2008. From the jump, the Machine Guns have fared well against opponents of all sorts.

about his in-ring return. That's when the potential of a MCMG reunion was brought up.

Sabin approached his former tag partner about the idea, and Shelley was on board. This led to six weeks of preparation going into the Slammiversary surprise. The duo even scheduled training sessions at a Detroit wrestling school. If there was any joint ring rust, they were going to dust it off.

"I think a lot of how well it went had to do with being prepared. When people say, 'These guys haven't missed a beat.' That's because we put the work in," Shelley said. "Granted, we did pick it up quickly from where we left off. At the same time, we had the foresight to make sure we were mechanically able to do the things we used to do."

"We've worked side-by-side for so long. You develop a chemistry. Quantum entanglement," Sabin added. "We are on the same frequency. We traveled so much together. We wrestled with and against each other. So much that it is like riding a bike. You put it down for years and pick it up. It might not be exactly the same at first, but you pick it up really quickly with a little practice."

But the team was not content living off nostalgia. They wanted to contribute in a meaningful way, adding star power to a flourishing tag division.

"We take the mentality that if everybody is going left, we're going to go right. If you examine our matches since we've reunited this year in Impact, and compared them to

what we've done in the past, stylistically it's very different," Shelley said. "Different is good, especially in tag team wrestling. That's one of the reasons Impact has such a strong tag team division. You have the Machine Guns, The North, The Good Brothers. You have The Rascalz. You have all these teams that work differently. We need different."

Interestingly enough, Shelley began 2020 by reconnecting with another partner in Kushida on *NXT*, briefly reforming The Time Splitters. The former IWGP junior heavyweight tag team champions competed in the Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic. The veteran's WWE stay was short-lived, though, which later in the year left the door open for an Impact run. For Shelley, the atmosphere in the promotion is night and day compared to his past stint that ended in 2012. He speaks highly of the talent in today's locker

room, feeling they can go farther thanks to a less politicized environment and the removal of glass ceilings.

"I really enjoy being here right now," said Shelley, who at press time was unsigned with the company. "I really, truly think the Machine Guns are operating on a different level than we have in the past. I feel like we're improving, even though we've been teaming for so long



PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD/IMPACT WRESTLING

Sabin nails Karl Anderson with a forearm at Bound for Glory. With Shelley attacked before the bell, Sabin was left to defend the Impact tag belts alone in a four-way dance ultimately won by The North.

we kind of pioneered a style that everybody uses now. We're evolving that style, too. I think Impact, artistically speaking, is a good breeding ground for that."

Sabin finds himself gaining a widened perspective by working matches after producing. He can take from each role's experience and apply the respective knowledge accordingly. Through the process, he has gained a newfound respect for the unsung heroes, including the technicians in the production truck.

The celebrated competitor also sees how far MCMG have come, citing their 2008 match with Speed Muscle (Masato Yoshino and Naruki Doi) as an eye-opener for the powers-that-be. Despite their impressive showing, Shelley remembered the uphill battle of making decision-makers at Impact, then known as TNA, into believers.

"It took a lot of convincing for them to give us a chance as a tag team. Even then, we had everything working against us," Shelley said. "Management had their guys they wanted to run with. They were trying to thumb us down,

and we overcame all that. I think if we hadn't believed in ourselves or had the inner confidence, it wouldn't happen the way it did."



In New Japan, Alex Shelley formed a memorable pairing with Kushida, which made an isolated TV appearance earlier this year on NXT. Despite his success in NJPW, Shelley's reunion with Sabin felt like destiny.



Shelley and Sabin clobber Dezmond Xavier with a combination superkick/enziguri. The Machine Guns take pride in facing young teams like The Rascalz and other heirs to the style the Michigan natives helped innovate.

The MCMG are enjoying the ride and appreciating their time together rather than thinking far ahead. Sabin says their goal is to be the best they possibly can right now. They are not ones to rest on their laurels, and remain motivated to test their skills against the current crop of young guns while inspiring the next generation.

"Wrestling is very different than it was 10 years ago. Certainly, different than when we first started teaming in 2006," Shelley added. "It really doesn't matter what you've done in the past because, every week, there is something else topping it. It's not a matter of doing one or two or three or 10 spectacular things, and having that be the backbone of your career. It's about being consistent and consistently producing, which I feel we've done." □

OUR COMPUTER CONFIRMS:

THE STEINERS **ARE** THE
THE WORLD TODAY!

PWI REMASTERED



BEST TEAM IN

After feeding a high-power computer bales of information, it didn't take long to come up with a conclusion many fans already suspected: Rick and Scott Steiner are the finest tag team anywhere!

TEXT BY BOB SMITH

FROM THE VAULT:

This article first appeared in the September 1991 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. The main text and sidebar are reprinted here in full, accompanied by new classic photos.



This particular assignment was far different than the work Dimetri is used to performing. In this case, the editors of *PWI*, who had spoken to Dimetri several months ago while compiling facts for an article on Alexandra York, came up with a unique assignment: Find out which tag team is the finest in the sport.

"We had a pretty fair idea of who it was, but we wanted hard, conclusive proof," said Editor-in-Chief Craig Peters. "We provided Dr. Dimetri with all the information we could gather on the top 50 tag teams in the sport today. The project took about a week, but in the end it was worth it. There were some surprises in the final tabulations, but the overall top team was really no revelation. Who else could it be but Rick and Scott Steiner?"

Indeed, the computer confirmed what the editors and researchers—and most fans—had been saying for months. The Steiners, the current IWGP and WCW World tag team champions, emerged as the computer's overwhelming choice as the team most capable of defeating any other duo in the sport—in *any* federation.

"The program I formulated took in every factor possible," explained Dimetri. "We fed the won-lost records of 50 teams from around the world into the program. We also included what I call 'X' factors—stamina, power, speed, ring knowledge, and so on—into the program. Each wrestler, both

DR. ROBERT DIMETRI smiled as a harried intern knocked on his office door and placed a manila folder on his desk. The bespectacled head of the research department of the renowned David M. Everett Computer Institute became a leader in his profession by performing studies and programming for large corporations. The results of this latest research, however, brought him more *personal* enjoyment than most.

"My job gets kind of dry at times," said Dimetri as he placed his pipe in an ashtray and quickly opened the folder. "Sometimes all the number crunching gets a little monotonous. But this time, I took a lot of pleasure in coming up with this program. It was fun, and I'm glad you folks contacted me for this assignment."

Dimetri pored over the printouts for a few moments. When he raised his head, he was sporting a wry smile.

"All that information, all that time," laughed Dimetri. "All that hard work to confirm what I had already suspected."



1992: Rick and Scott Steiner face Great Muta (pictured) and Sting at the Tokyo Dome. The Steiners made a name for themselves not only in North America, but also in New Japan, where they wore the IWGP tag belts.

individually and as part of his team, was rated on his favored holds and maneuvers. That's where the Steiners really stood out. Few teams boast the incredible repertoire of those brothers.

"Then, after all the information was put into place, we ran simulated matches of each team against every other team in the analysis—a computer tournament, if you will," continued Dimetri. "We expected the Steiners to win, but what surprised us was that they never came close to suffering a single loss, even against teams they had never met in the past."

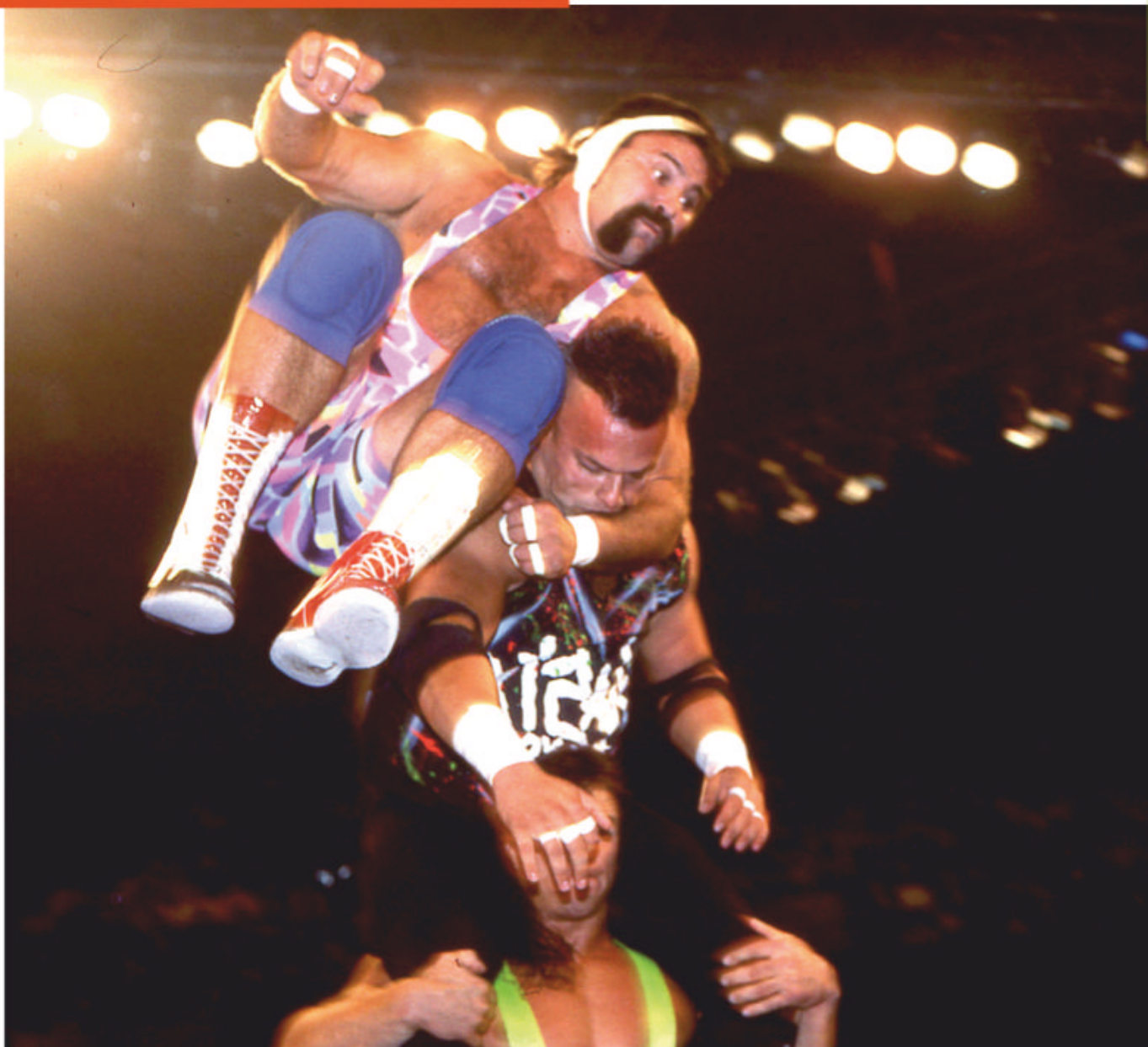
The final top five as ranked by the computer looked far different than the actual top five found on our ratings pages. The Steiners were trailed by WWF contenders The Legion of Doom, former IWGP tag champions Hiroshi Hase and Kensuke Sasaki, WWF World tag team champions The Nasty Boys, and WCW's on-

again, off-again pairing of Barry Windham and Arn Anderson.

"Even with that kind of opposition, the mock tourney was a piece of cake for Rick and Scott," said Dimetri, a bit surprised. "Most notably, the Steiners scored their easiest and quickest victory over The Nasty Boys, with whom they feuded in WCW a year ago. Scott's 'Frankensteiner' resulted in a pin of Jerry Sags. In this battle of world tag team champions, the Steiners were clearly superior."

When we informed the Steiners about their victory in this computerized competition, they, too, were pleased, but not overly surprised.

"It's like we've been saying all along," said Scott Steiner.



1990: In WCW, Jerry Sags falls victim to the devastating "Steinerizer." While the Nasty Boys fared better in the WWF than WCW, it was clear the Steiners remained the superior team.

THE COMPUTER TOURNEY: ONLY A DREAM—FOR NOW

When the Everett Institute's computer tag team tournament was conducted, Bob Smith, who researched computer sports games in the 1990 book *The Whole Baseball Catalogue*, was invited to watch the final three rounds.

"If Dr. Dimetri and his staff could pare their program down for smaller-memory computers, it would be an incredible PC [personal computer] game," said an impressed Smith after the tourney. "The digitally generated images of the wrestlers were extremely lifelike. The realism was uncanny, even when some stunning upsets occurred."

And the upsets were very surprising. Smith noted that currently unrated duos such as The Power Twins, The Equalizers, the Mexican team of Brazo De Oro and Brazo De Plata, and Steve Ray and Sunny Beach made their way into the final 20.

"It just proves there are many more fine tag teams in this sport than I realized," said Smith. "But it also reinforced in my mind the greatness that Rick and Scott Steiner are capable of. The scary part is that they're really just getting started in their careers."

"We're the best, and it doesn't matter *what* forum we're presented in. We worked our way into contention in the U.S., and we've won the WCW World tag title twice now. We went to Japan, and we beat Hase and Sasaki for Japan's top title. Now, even a computer says we're unbeatable. It makes me feel pretty good to know that even scientists and researchers have confirmed what our fans have known for a long time."

Not everyone who heard the results of the Everett Institute's study was pleased. Stan Hansen, for one, questioned the accuracy of the computer and the researchers who fed it information. Hansen and Dan Spivey, current All-Japan and PWF tag champs, ranked sixth.

"Typical bull," spit Hansen along with a stream of rancid tobacco juice. "What do a bunch of wimps in white smocks know about 'rasslin'? Nothin'! These kind of studies are given far too much credibility. The only reason Danny and I haven't beaten the

Steiners is that they haven't had the guts to face us—yet, anyway. Once we do, we'll make those computer experts look like the bunch of damn fools they really are."

Hansen's comments notwithstanding, the Steiners' emergence as the top team in the Everett project was significant for a number of reasons. When other teams get in the ring to face Rick and Scott, they'll be armed with the knowledge that they'll be wrestling a team that is considered unbeatable. And despite the seeming innocuousness of the project, Dimetri said he's received hundreds of phone calls about the results.

"Alexandra York has tried to reach me dozens of times, but this project is privy only to me and the staff of *PWI*," said Dimetri. "She'd probably kill to get this kind of information."

So would every other team in the sport. □



1991: Scott Steiner suplexes the massive Mr. Hughes with ease. The "computer program" referenced in this article from *PWI*'s kayfabe era rated Scott Steiner highly for his strength, agility, and stamina.

Sibling Revelry

WHY TEAM SEA STARS ARE THE FEEL-GOOD STORY OF 2020

TEXT BY JAKE JOYCE

WHILE OTHERS MAY wish upon a star, Team Sea Stars cut to the chase and instead chose to believe in themselves. With only five years in the business, real-life sisters Ashley Vox and Delmi Exo have made some big waves on the independent wrestling scene. The current SHIMMER tag champs have recorded victories over renowned tandems including Cheerleader Melissa and Mercedes Martinez, Bear Country, and AEW's Santana and Ortiz. The duo has proven hugely popular with fans, entering the ring in colorful, complementary attire to the sounds of Blue Swede's "Hooked On A Feeling," and displaying a shared energy (and knack for cooperation) that can only come from a shared bloodline.

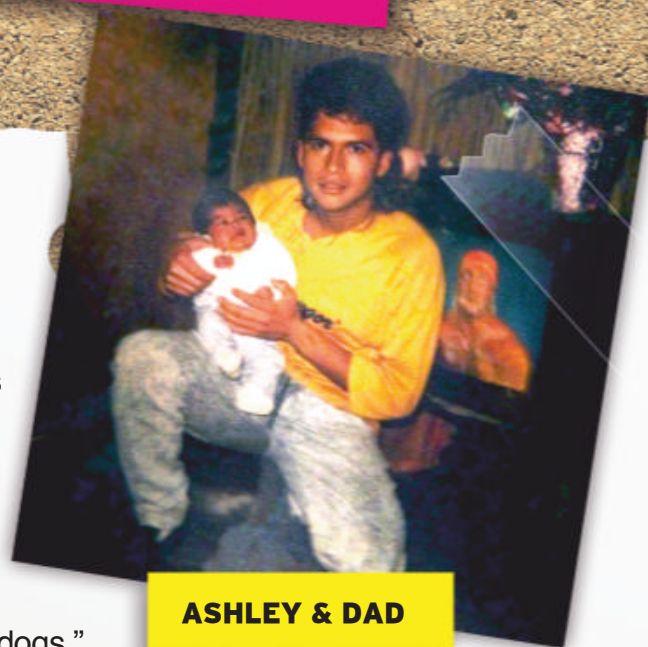
Driven by a love of the sport, Vox and Exo have been grinding hard since their debut half a decade ago. Born in Rhode Island, albeit seven years apart, the story of Team Sea Stars (a pun playing on Exo's pronunciation of "sister" as a child) began halfway across the country.

"Our parents actually met in Texas, and they moved up here to Rhode Island," Vox said.

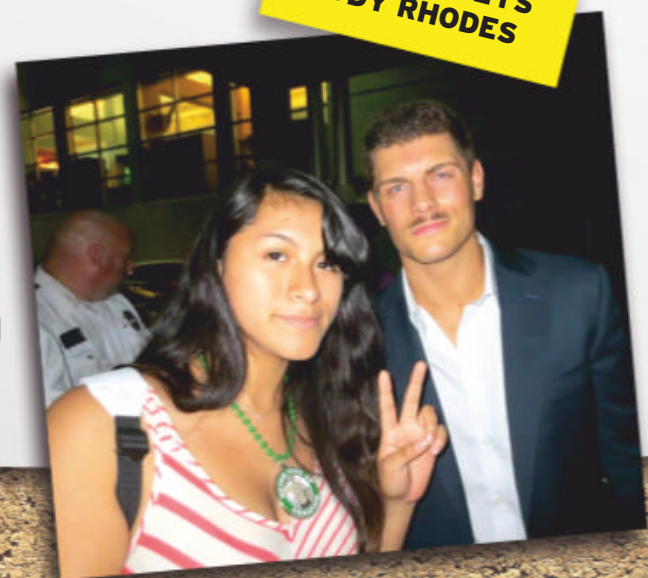
"One of my dad's friends said, 'There's a great job opportunity.' And then they were working for, like, a hot dog factory, literally making hot dogs."

Although the young family was granted a new life, their road to success was still an uphill trek. "We grew up very poor," Vox recalled. Their father eventually began working for Garelick Farms, while their mother became a nurse. For their part, the sisters became partial to a very different industry.

First introduced to professional wrestling by her father, Ashley Vox fondly remembers watching with him. "He would *always* watch. His favorite characters were Macho Man and Hulk Hogan."



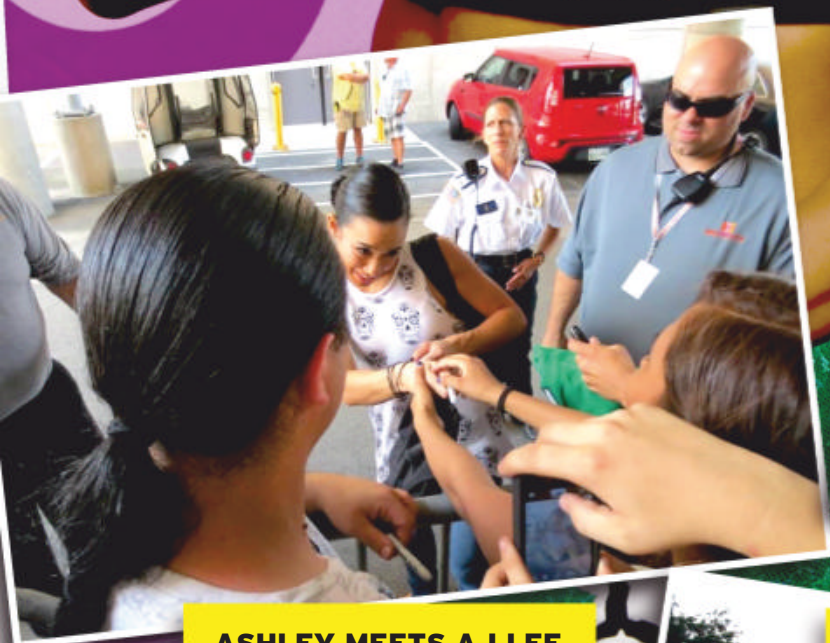
ASHLEY & DAD



DELMI MEETS
CODY RHODES

PHOTO BY EARL GARDNER

From their humble beginnings in New England to the top of the tag team ranks, Ashley Vox and Delmi Exo have delighted and inspired fans. Now, PWI peels back the curtain on one of indie wrestling's most popular tandems.



ASHLEY MEETS AJ LEE



NEW SHIMMER TAG CHAMPS

PHOTO BY SCOTT LESH



FIRST TIME TEAMING UP

PHOTO BY EARL GARDNER



Ashley Vox applies her signature fishhook to AC Mack as she prepares to tag in Delmi Exo. The Sea Stars have thrived in intergender matches since long before the style was accepted.

Before long, Vox had introduced the younger Exo to the sport. With a fire in their bellies, the sisters began dreaming of a future as professional wrestlers. “We wanted to be like Jeff and Matt Hardy,” Vox said. “We played the video games together as a tag team. That was pretty much what we had in our minds, but we didn’t know how to do it.”

Unaware of their region’s rich independent scene, the Sea Stars admit they had a myopic understanding of the training process. “I thought it was only *Tough Enough*, like that’s the only way you can get into WWE,” Vox said. “I had no idea about independent wrestling at all. I had no idea about schools, nothing like that. Once I did some research, I ran into independent shows, and it was a whole new world!”

Team Sea Stars began their training under local indie wrestler Doug Summers in a converted barn in New England. While Vox had initially planned to enroll alone, Exo tagged along to support her sister on her first day. The younger Sea Star made a last minute decision.

“I remember thinking, *I’ve got to try this, I want to get in*,” Exo said. “You grow up watching it for so long and you finally see a real wrestling ring in front of you, and you’re like, ‘I want to touch it!’”

Today, the Sea Stars have competed for a wealth of women’s pro-

motions including SHIMMER, SHINE, and Queens of Combat. In the early days, this wasn’t an option. “When we were training, there were no other girls,” Vox said. “It was just Delmi and me. We trained with guys and we felt comfortable.”

To create more opportunities for themselves, the sisters adopted individual surnames and personas: Ashley Vox, the mermaid, and Delmi Exo, the alien. (This was another reason for the eventual “Team Sea Stars” moniker.)

Another consequence of the lack of female opponents: Vox and Exo became adept in intergender matches. But, coming at a time when this style was still quite controversial, the Sea Stars had to be extra careful about how they participated. “If you were a girl and you were trying to defend intergender wrestling at

the time, you’d just get eaten alive,” Exo recalled. “We would come to CHIKARA and have a stellar match, but we still had to go back to our local promotion, and we didn’t want to get heat for powerbombing a guy. ‘Well, now how are we going to book you?’ It was like walking on eggshells at the time.”

What began as an adaptation became part of Team Sea Stars’ repertoire. On top of being fierce singles com-

Exo dives out of the ring onto Jessica Troy and Charli Evans. The Sea Stars would go on to defeat the pair in their first successful SHIMMER title defense.

PHOTO BY SCOTT LESH



petitors and working fluidly as a tag team, Vox and Exo have both become pioneers in the art of intergender wrestling. And, after several years of hustling on the independent circuit, the Sea Stars finally began reaping the rewards, winning tag team gold in SHIMMER, California's Sabotage Wrestling, and New York's Battle Club Pro. Vox and Exo were also the only two wrestlers to be ranked on this year's *PWI* "500," "Women's 100," and "Tag Team 50." After years of never making the *PWI* charts, the siblings consider this a great honor.

As sweet as 2020 has been for Team Sea Stars, their momentum was, of course, throttled by the pandemic. Delmi Exo faced a serious dilemma as COVID-19 hit a boiling point. In January of 2020, she'd headed to Japan to train at the Marvelous Dojo. Two months

later, as the shutdown began in earnest, she suddenly realized she might get trapped overseas.

"I got the text that my flight had gotten canceled. [Fellow indie wres-

ter] Masha Slamovich stayed in the room with me while I was just having a panic attack," Exo recalled. "I was on hold for like for maybe 3 hours calling the airlines. Finally they were like, 'We have a flight tonight.' I saw the board where all the flights were listed. My gate wasn't listed yet, so I would walk by that board, and there were all these flights that were just like 'Canceled/Canceled/Canceled.' Please don't cancel my flight!"

Fortunately, Exo got home without incident. And, in recent months, the Sea Stars have picked up where they left off. On top of competing at Limitless Wrestling throughout the summer and early-fall (including Vox challenging Anthony Greene in his final independent title defense), both women were able to take part in The

Collective's big weekend this October, successfully defending their SHIMMER tag belts against Marti Belle and Allysin Kay.

When asked to give advice to other young women who might want to follow in their impressive footsteps, Team Sea Stars didn't mince words. "Know who to trust, and just stay healthy as long as you can," Exo said. "If you get injured, you don't have to be a tough guy!"

Vox expressed similar sentiments. "Delmi and I have been doing this for five years. It's a lot of patience, a lot of learning. Be humble. Be patient."

Indeed, for Team Sea Stars, hard work and patience have already led to some remarkable things ... and the best may still lie ahead. □

PHOTO BY BASIL MAHMUD

Propelled by her sister, Vox lands the "Flopping Fish" (an assisted somersault senton) to secure a victory over Allysin Kay and Marti Belle.

Ashley Vox and Delmi Exo celebrate with the SHIMMER tag belts, which they've now held for more than a year. 2020 wasn't always easy for the Sea Stars, but it was a year they'll never forget.

PHOTO BY EARL GARDNER

BORN AUGUST 22, 1985 in San Francisco, CA, twin brothers Jonathan and Joshua Fatu are better known today as Jimmy and Jey Uso, respectively ... Sons of former WWE fan favorite Rikishi adopted the surname “Uso,” which is the Samoan word for “brother” ... True tag team lifers, they debuted together in 2009, briefly appearing on the indies as “The Samoan Soldiers” before signing with WWE, where they first competed under their real last name ... The Fatu Brothers proved dominant in Florida Championship Wrestling through early-2010, ultimately defeating Joe Hennig (Curtis Axel) and Brett DiBiase for the FCW tag belts ... Lost the title that June, a month after making their main roster debut on *Raw* ... Teaming up with Tamina Snuka, the rechristened Usos feuded extensively with The Hart Dynasty ... Competed in the *Raw* tag division to mixed success, failing to capture the brand’s tag straps in multiple attempts ... Became entangled with The Colons for much of late 2011, facing off on both *Raw* and *Smackdown* (to which they were eventually drafted) ... Also appeared on NXT’s weekly TV shows, managing a slightly better win-loss record ... Remained active at *Smackdown* live events throughout 2012, often battling The Prime Time Players (and usually winning) ... The Usos wouldn’t wear any more gold until March 2014, when they beat The New Age Outlaws for

the WWE tag team title ... Managed an impressive reign, defending the belts successfully for more than 200 days before losing them at Night of Champions to Goldust and Stardust (Cody Rhodes) ... Reclaimed the gold on a December episode of *Raw* and charted an additional 55 days as co-champions ... Voted Tag Team of the Year in *PWI*’s 2014 Achievement Awards ... Jey suf-

after a humiliating loss ... Lost to eventual champs Rhyno and Heath Slater in the tourney final at Backlash ... Finally beat American Alpha for the belts on the March 21 edition of *Smackdown* ... With that win, became the first team to capture the Raw and Smackdown tag team belts ... Wore the gold for most of 2017—spread out over three reigns—as they engaged in a red-hot rivalry with The New Day ... Feud continued into WrestleMania

34, where the two teams lost a triple-threat to The Bludgeon Brothers (Erick Rowan & Brodie Lee), ending The Usos’ reign ... Later proved consistently unable to dethrone The Bar as tag champs ... Won a four-way #1 contender’s match (including The Bar, The New Day, and Heavy Machinery) to earn a title shot at Elimination Chamber ... Defeated Shane McMahon and The Miz to claim the Smackdown tag championship for

a fourth time ... Retained the belts in a four-way match at WrestleMania 35 before dropping them to The Hardys on *Smackdown* ... Moved back to *Raw*, where they memorably feuded with The Revival (FTR) ... With Jimmy in limbo due to legal issues, then later sidelined by injury, Jey emerged as a singles star on the Smackdown brand in late-2020 ... Jimmy supported him, making the difficult call to throw in the towel during Jey’s main event title shot against Roman Reigns at Clash of Champions. ■



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

The Usos pose on the red carpet with former Women’s champion Naomi (who happens to be Jimmy’s wife) at WWE’s 2019 Hall of Fame ceremony.

fered a shoulder injury in early-2015, leaving Jimmy briefly to his own devices ... Though The Usos accomplished little on paper that year, they remained viable by partnering with real-life cousin Roman Reigns and feuding with some of WWE’s top tandems on *Raw* ... Honored in the 2015 Slammy Awards as “Tag Team Of The Year” ... 2016 saw Jimmy and Jey return to Smackdown, where they entered a tournament to crown the brand’s inaugural tag champs ... Turned heel by attacking American Alpha



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THE ULTIMATE TEAM PLAYER

ROCKY ROMERO'S
EXTRAORDINARY
RELATIONSHIP
WITH NJPW



TEXT BY WALTER YEATES

He holds the record for most reigns with the IWGP junior heavyweight tag title, mentors the division's hottest tandem, and is helping New Japan grow its presence internationally. But Romero's journey to the Tokyo Dome began humbly, on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.



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C **HARISMATIC. DYNAMIC. INDISPENSABLE.** Though not a household name on the level of, say, Kazuchika Okada, NJPW staple Rocky Romero ranks among the most recognizable

faces of the company during its rise as an international force in professional wrestling. He's won the IWGP junior heavyweight tag team championship on eight occasions: four times with Beretta (AEW's Trent) as the popular Roppongi Vice team, twice with Alex Koslov as Forever Hooligans, and twice with Davey Richards as No Remorse Corps. He's also the mentor to four-time IWGP junior tag champions Sho and Yoh, Roppongi 3K. His unique path within NJPW dates back to an invitation he received nearly 20 years ago.

"In 2001-ish or early 2002, I was invited to go train and help set up the original L.A. Dojo," Romero said. "It was being run by Justin McCully, who was a former UFC fighter and professional wrestler in New Japan."

Romero said he met McCully through Samoa Joe while the two were working at Ultimate Pro Wrestling in Southern California. "We went down there not knowing really what to expect," Romero said, adding he and Joe both helped set up the ring and mats.

Masahiro Chono, Jushin "Thunder" Liger, and Hiroyoshi Tenzan came to the facility's grand opening event, where they, along with members of the media, were witness to a series of introductory matches.

"Me, Samoa Joe, Chris Daniels, Hardkore Kidd (Aaron Aguilera), Ricky Reyes, and maybe TJP," Romero recalled, when asked who took part. After that, the young wrestler began a four-year stint at the Dojo, where he trained "pretty much every day."

"We trained primarily MMA more than

professional wrestling," he said. "That was the [Antonio] Inoki way, it was old school."

Bas Rutten, Frank Trigg, Wallid Ismail, "Diamond" Dallas Page, and Joanie Laurer (Chyna) all contributed to the L.A. Dojo training at one point or another. "It was a cool place to train because you never knew who was going to show up," Romero remembered.

Romero clarified that the original dojo—which closed in 2005—was more associated with Inoki than NJPW itself at the time, unlike the new L.A. Dojo that has the weight of the company supporting its growth.

"This dojo is doing it in a more formal kind of way, and a better system," he said. "There was Inoki, and there was New Japan, two very big, powerful entities that weren't always on the same page. I never felt they were completely cohesive when it came to the L.A. Dojo, compared to now when it is a complete entity and an extension of New Japan."

Romero connected NJPW's expansion into the United States with the health of the current L.A. Dojo, where he's helping train the next generation. "This dojo is true representation of [the] true New Japan Young Lion system," he said. With Katsuyori



Rocky Romero and Roppongi 3K (Sho & Yoh) triple-team Davey Boy Smith Jr. at New Year Dash 2019. One of the true greats of NJPW's junior tag division, Romero has become a proud mentor to the young team.



In a show of sportsmanship, Romero and Ryusuke Taguchi (pictured right) pose with champions Sho & Yoh before an enthusiastic crowd at Tokyo's Korakuen Hall.

Shibata as head trainer, Romero feels the talent graduating from the dojo will have a bright future due to their athletic ability and Shibata's intricate instruction.

Romero gave credit to the first Shibata Young Lion graduate, "Alpha Wolf" Karl Fredericks, for his coachability and outstanding natural athletic ability. He also feels L.A. Dojo Young Lion Clark Connors is "a true embodiment" of the Shibata work ethic, and praises the potential of Alex Coughlin (another L.A. Young Lion).

"I think more stars will come out of the L.A. Dojo than any other training facility in the world," he predicted. "Mark my words."

Among the techniques learned by Dojo trainees are the fundamentals of tag wrestling. "The tag team aspect was always important, even going back to the 1970s and 1980s," Romero said. He believes tag team wrestling gives athletes and fans a new focus and keeps things fresh, adding that it could become a bigger focus in NJPW as the brand expands within the U.S.

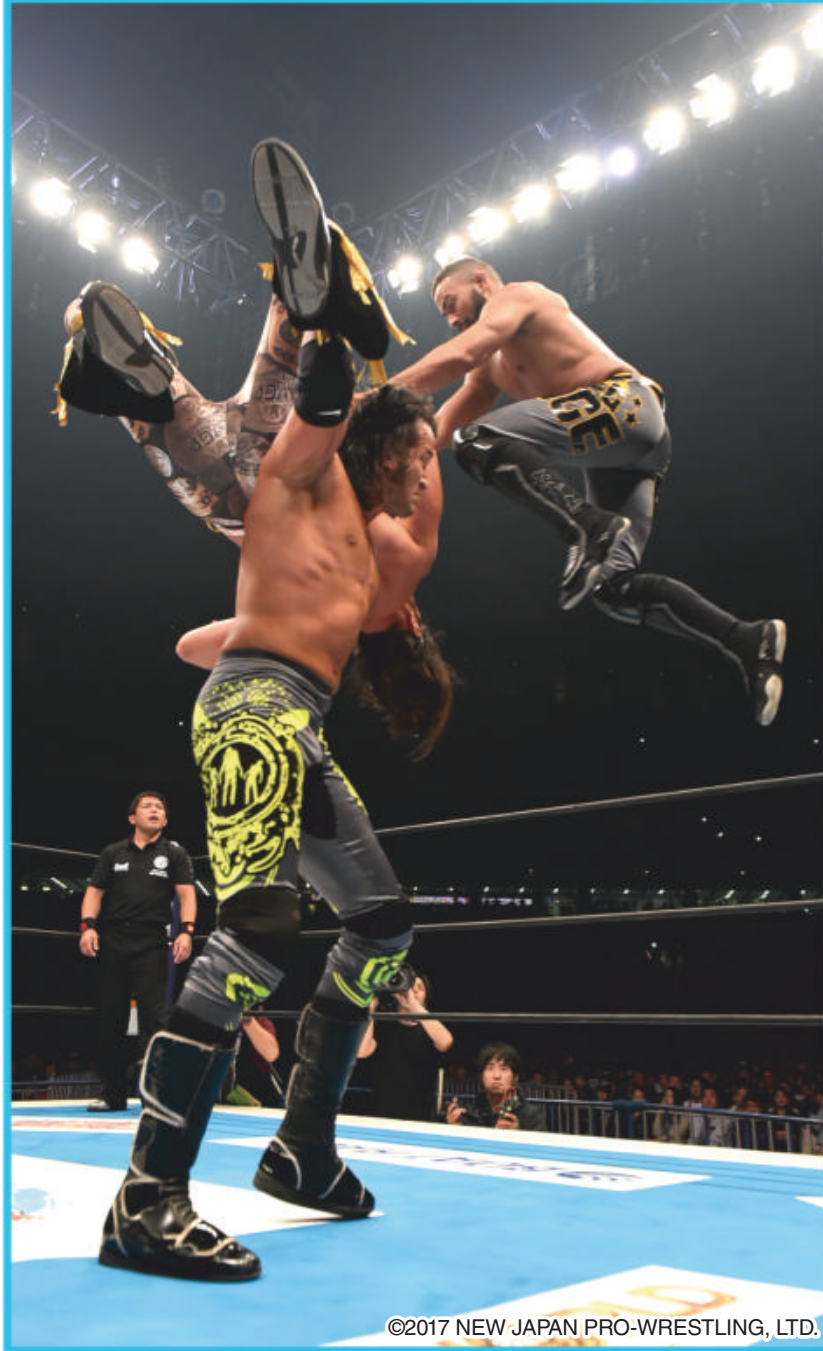
Romero's own enthusiasm for tag wrestling started years ago. "Maybe the first tag team that stood out to me was The Rockers, and then maybe Demolition," he said. Romero appreciated the unique presentation of both teams, while The Rockers impressed him with their style and how they worked together.

"Having great communication is the most important thing to a good tag team," he said. "When you see a team like The Young Bucks,



While Roppongi Vice may have marked the peak of his ring work (above), Romero looks back fondly on teaming with Alex Koslov as Forever Hooligans (below).





Rocky Romero and Beretta display impressive teamwork en route to victory over The Young Bucks at the Tokyo Dome—a definite career highlight for the NJPW mainstay.

who I think are one of the best tag teams ever, they have great communication, and that's why they've been able to succeed at a high level for a long time."

In New Japan, the Bucks proved great rivals for Rocky Romero, with the three men squaring off four years straight at Wrestle Kingdom, NJPW's annual mega-show at the Tokyo Dome. At Wrestle Kingdom 11, Romero and Beretta defeated the Young Bucks to capture the IWGP junior heavyweight tag belts.

When asked about his past partners, Romero has difficulty picking a favorite. "I really loved them all for different reasons, to be honest," he said. "They were all very different.

"I really like the work I did the most with Beretta. For entertainment value, I loved the stuff I did with Forever Hooligans and Koslov, he was a great partner," he continued. Romero also appreciated his tag team with Ricky Reyes, and the straightforward mentality that ran through his work with Davey Richards, where he could be the entertaining side of the team.

Some newer NJPW fans might know Romero less for his tag work and more for his English-language commentary. He gives credit to Kevin Kelly for mentoring him in this role, calling him an "absolutely amazing partner." With Romero providing support on camera and behind the scenes, NJPW has presented successful events in the United States and the United Kingdom, eventually leading to the creation of the New Japan of America brand.

"I feel that we have so much more to grow in the United States," Rocky said, when asked about future international expansion plans. "I would like to see *Strong* [*New Japan Strong*, the episodic program on the New Japan World streaming service] being at the forefront, or be a part of it."

Romero feels the episodic nature of *New Japan Strong* makes the program friendly for TV stations, as its format is similar to traditional wrestling products that have received international broadcasting deals. He hinted that *New Japan Strong* could be where future NJPW talent goes to hone its craft, as the program is part of the brand now.

When asked what makes NJPW stand out from other major wrestling organizations, Romero didn't hold back. "It has true heart and guts, you're not being sold anything," he said. "We are kind of like the sports product; we are closer to MMA and boxing in presentation than anyone else. It's all about being the best and being the champion."

Nowhere is this mentality more prevalent than at Wrestle Kingdom. The 15th annual show is set for January 4 and 5, 2021, at the Tokyo Dome.

"When you talk about wrestling events worldwide, it's been about WrestleMania," Romero said. "Now, Wrestle Kingdom has joined that conversation.

"Last year, to see 70,000 people over two days, and 15,000 from around the world was amazing ... and shows the power of New Japan Pro-Wrestling internationally."

And, from ring work to mentoring, English-language commentary to growing the brand stateside, Rocky Romero remains one of New Japan's most powerful international assets. □

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY WALTER YEATES

AUTUMN IS NOW the season for the most prestigious round-robin tournaments in Japan with New Japan Pro-Wrestling (NJPW), All Japan Pro Wrestling (AJPW), and Pro Wrestling NOAH hosting the annual G1 Climax, Champion Carnival, and N-1 Victory, respectively, during the period.

Over the past decade, G1 Climax has transformed into inarguably the most prestigious professional wrestling tournament, having hosted a slew of classic matches that have grabbed praise from fans, pundits, and wrestling journalists across the world.

This year's edition, G1 Climax 30, was the first held in the autumn months, originally moving due to the 2020 Summer Olympics scheduled to take place in Japan. After COVID-19 led to the postponement of the Olympics, the G1 Climax 30 continued as scheduled, in what may become its permanent yearly slot.

The tournament saw the elevation of NJPW talents including **Will Ospreay** and **SANADA**, while **EVIL** remained a relevant force in the marquee portion of NJPW events. **Jeff Cobb** also took a step forward in his New Japan career, putting together solid performances to add to his already impressive work for the New Japan of America brand.

The current IWGP World heavyweight and IWGP Intercontinental "Double Champion" **Tetsuya Naito**, **Kazuchika Okada**, **Kota**

Ibushi, and **Jay White** remained G1 frontrunners, winning matches and putting on performances that received rave reviews from English speaking fans on various social media platforms.

Ibushi (14 points) would win the A Block with Ospreay (12 points), White (12 points), and Okada (12 points) directly behind him. Additionally, Ospreay turning his back on Okada was a major narrative coming out of the final A-Block day. Ospreay would gain his first-ever fall over Okada with the help of World Wonder Ring Stardom standout (and SWA Undisputed Women's champ) **Bea Priestley** and **The**

Great-O-Khan, who had returned from his Revolution Pro Wrestling (RevPro) excursion in the United Kingdom, where he had found some success.

SANADA (12 points) would take B Block with EVIL (12 points) and Naito (12 points) trailing him. Despite the tied score, SANADA's victories over both EVIL and Naito during the tourney allowed him to advance to the final against Ibushi. The 35 minute, 10 second finale is the longest in G1 Climax finals history. The match saw Ibushi become the first back-to-back winner since **Hiroyoshi Tenzan** won G1 Climax 13 & 14 in 2003

En route to victory in the G1 Climax final, Kota Ibushi connects with a hard strike on his opponent, SANADA.



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and 2004. The victory for Ibushi gave him the right to challenge for the “Double Championship” during the two-night Wrestle Kingdom 15 (January 4th and 5th), unless he loses the opportunity before the event.

The ten-person Champion Carnival 2020 was half the size of G1 Climax 30 and saw **Zeus** (8 points) win Block A with **Jake Lee** (6 points) trailing him. AJPW ace **Kento Miyahara** (6 points) won Block B with **Shuji Ishikawa** (4 points) behind him.

Zeus would defeat Miyahara in the final in a match that went 31 minutes and 5 seconds. It was only the third victory Zeus gained over Miyahara in their nine singles matches against one another. Their very first singles match during Champion Carnival 2015 ended in a 30-minute time limit draw.

The 12-person 2020 N-1 Victory saw **Kaito Kiyomiya** (7 points) take Block A with GHC heavyweight champion **Go Shiozaki** (6 points) directly behind him. **Katsuhiko Nakajima** (8 points) won Block B with **Takashi Sugiura** (7 points) narrowly behind.

Nakajima would win the final over Kiyomiya in a little over 25 minutes to set himself up for a future GHC heavyweight championship match.

Away from tournament action, Middle Kingdom Wrestling (MKW) has continued its *Blast-Off* program on YouTube, pushing forward with its decidedly sports entertainment-centric product from China.

In Mexico, Consejo Mundial de Lucha Libre (CMLL) hosted its 87th Anniversary show, which saw **Reina Isis** win the Mexican National Women's

Katsuhiko Nakajima kicks Kaito Kiyomiya in the final contest of NOAH's N-1 Victory tournament. He would go on to win the match, along with a GHC heavyweight title opportunity.



©NOAH PROWRESTLING

championship from **La Metalica**. **Nueva Generacion Dinamita** (**El Cuatrero**, **Forastero**, & **Sanson**) successfully defended their Mexican National Trios championship against **Cancerbero**, **Raziel**, & **Virus**.

Marcela would retain her CMLL Women's title against **Dalys**, **Volador Jr.** successfully defended the NWA Historic Welterweight championship against **Templario**, and brothers **Caristico** & **Mistico** retained the CMLL tag team championship against **Espiritu Negro** & **Rey Cometa**.

Lucha Libre AAA has also returned to action with safety restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The company has relaunched its *Auto Luchas* program on Facebook for free live streaming, and it is making plans for feature events in the future.

In the United Kingdom, RevPro hosted Epic Encounters 3 & 4. The former was headlined by Will Ospreay successfully defending the RevPro Undisputed British heavyweight championship against **Kyle Fletcher**, while the latter saw **Gisele Shaw**

successfully defend the RevPro Undisputed British Women's championship against Bea Priestley, who is an Oedo Tai member in Stardom.

New Japan Strong continues on the New Japan World streaming service, featuring a wealth of tournament action. **KENTA** defeated **David Finlay** in the New Japan Cup USA 2020 final to earn the third title shot in the second reign of IWGP United States champ **Jon Moxley**.

While things didn't completely go his way during G1 Climax 30, **Hiroshi Tanahashi's** block victory over KENTA set him up to challenge for the IWGP United States heavyweight championship at Power Struggle in November. KENTA was also set to defend his NEVER Openweight title against David Finlay on *New Japan Strong* during the “Showdown” tour.

NJPW Los Angeles Dojo Young Lion **Clark Connors** would defeat **Danny Limelight** in the final of the Lion's Break Crown tournament, which is the New Japan of America equivalent of the Young Lion's Cup held in Japan. □

INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY ANDREA HANGST

IN THE FACE of the pandemic, the independent wrestling scene continued to run shows throughout the late-summer and into autumn. Here are some highlights from shows that have taken place in the past few months.

THE COLLECTIVE 2020

The pandemic not only forced WWE to hold a fan-less WrestleMania in April, it also caused the cancellation of the dozens of indie shows scheduled during that week. Some of the more anticipated offerings came once again by way of The Collective, a group of indie promotions and wrestlers working together under the GCW banner to run multiple shows.

However, GCW pressed on and managed to bring revamped versions of 12 of those shows to the Marion County (IN) Fairgrounds on October 9-11. The three days, with four shows per day, did not disappoint, showcasing some of the most prominent and most entertaining performers in the indie wrestling scene.

Numerous shows were stand-outs, including For The Culture (brought together by **AJ Gray** and **J-Rose** and featuring some of the top Black talent from the indie scene), Effy's Big Gay Brunch, Joey Janela's Spring Break 4, Josh Barnett's Bloodsport—where AEW World champ **Jon Moxley** bested **Chris Dickinson** in the show's main event—and a late-night

Freelance/Freelance Underground co-branded show that, while emanating in the wee hours post-Spring Break, was still a highlight.

Key matches from the weekend included **Marko Stunt** (a late replacement for **Priscilla Kelly**) defeating **Effy** and **Cassandro** beating **Sonny Kiss** at Big Gay Brunch, AJ Gray making a last-minute challenge to Southern Underground Pro Bonestorm champion **AC Mack** at SUP's Swing of the Axe (and winning the title), **Joshua Bishop** besting **Matthew Justice** in a No-Rope Barbed Wire Match for the AIW Absolute title, and every match featuring **Lee Moriarty**, who was arguably the breakout performer of the weekend with an exhausting six-match schedule.

One thing that should be noted is that The Collective, while run with an abundance of caution and with safety measures in place, still featured 12 shows, dozens of performers, and took place indoors in front of hundreds of fans (albeit with masks required) in a state that had seen all-time highs in new COVID-19 cases. Most, if not everyone, in attendance was well aware of the risks, but awareness doesn't make anyone invulnerable to a highly contagious virus.

At least five performers reported positive COVID tests in the days after The Collective: AC Mack, **Cabana Man Dan**, **Dan The Dad**, AJ Gray (who confirmed he contracted it after The Collective and tested negative three times after the shows), and **Tony Deppen**.



Lee Moriarty is forced to rethink his approach after ACH catches his leg at GCW's For The Culture. Moriarty was arguably the MVP of The Collective, defeating ACH and competing in five other big matches over the weekend.

PHOTO BY EARL GARDNER



In the main event of Effy's Big Gay Brunch—a show that spotlighted LGBTQ+ talent—AEW's Sonny Kiss applies a modified straitjacket hold on Cassandro, the legendary Mexican *exotico* (who would ultimately take the match by pinfall).

Dan The Dad later tweeted that he had subsequently tested negative and had no symptoms. Nevertheless, AEW pulled **Joey Janela** from the October 21 episode of *Dynamite* (where he was slated to face **Kenny Omega**) out of caution, as he had faced Gray at GCW's The Last Resort on October 17. Other wrestlers, including **WARHORSE**, tested negative but chose to cancel bookings for the following weekend in order to take additional tests.

TURBO GRAPS 16

Black Label Pro held its annual Turbo Graps 16 tournament at Rds Gym in Crown Point, Indiana, on the weekend of October 3 and 4. The shows also featured tag team and title matches in addition to the titular tournament, the final match determining the BLP Midwest championship. Day-one action saw **Jake Something** successfully defend his BLP heavyweight championship against **Calvin Tankman** and **Violence Is Forever** (**Dominic Garrini** & **Kevin Ku**) defeat buzzworthy tag team **Top Flight** (**Air Wolf** & **Angel Dorado**).

In tournament action, AJ Gray bested **Erick Stevens** while **Ethan**

ever, could not hang on and fell to Shelley in just over 15 minutes.

Other matches included BLP tag team champs **The Besties in The World** successfully defending against **To Infinity and Beyond**, **WARHORSE** retaining his IWTW Independent Wrestling championship over Joshua Bishop, and **EC3** defeating **Travis Titan**.

NO HOLDS BARRED/PITFIGHTER

ICW held Volumes 6 and 7 of its No Holds Barred series in September and October, as well as two more of their Pitfighter events—all based out of Millville, New Jersey. At Volume 6 ("Rollin' With The Punches"), Tony Deppen defeated **Joe Gacy**, **Casanova Valentine** beat **Jeff Cannonball**, and **Reed Bentley** defeated **Atticus Cogar**. Volume 7 ("Deathmatch Horror Story") saw **John Wayne Murdoch** defeat **Homicide** and **Matt Tremont** get the win over **Eddy Only**. Pitfighter X featured **Dominic Garrini** besting **Jimmy Lloyd**, as well as **Alex Ocean** and **Danny Demanto** battling to a no-contest. ICW is set to hold five more events in 2020, including Pitfighter X4 in Tampa, Florida,

Page defeated "his creation," Dan The Dad.

The incumbent Midwest champion, **Kylie Rae**, lost her match and her title to **Alex Shelley**. Shelley went on to face the winner of day two's semi-final four-way match, **Isaias Velazquez**, who defeated **ACH**, AJ Gray, and **Blake Christian** for the honor.

Velazquez, how-

ever, could not hang on and fell to Shelley in just over 15 minutes.

SYNERGY'S 3RD BIRTHDAY

New Jersey-based Synergy Pro Wrestling celebrated its third birthday on September 26 at the Monster Factory. Matches included **MV Young** defeating **Anthony Gangone**, **The Whisper** proving victorious in a four-way over **Ellis Taylor**, **KTB**, and **Matt Vertigo**, **Ace Austin** picking up the win over **Jordan Oliver** in a 21-minute match, and **TJ Crawford** retaining his Synergy Cruiserweight Crown over **Charles Mason**. Additionally, **Brandon Kirk** beat Tony Deppen to retain the Synergy championship and **WARHORSE** overtook **Frightmare**—lengthening his reign as Independent Wrestling champion, which now extends beyond 400 days.

TO RUN OR NOT TO RUN

Close to press time, St. Louis Anarchy made the difficult decision to cancel all of its October shows and, shortly thereafter, any remaining events for the rest of 2020. Beyond Wrestling soon followed suit, calling off its Tournament for Tomorrow and stating it wouldn't promote any additional events this year.

The choice to run events during the ongoing pandemic cannot be an easy one. The performers and promoters understand the risks of doing so and the risks of deciding against it. Still, the recent instances of positive tests underscore that this remains a very dangerous situation. And, with colder weather taking hold in most parts of the U.S., holding relatively safer outdoor shows is becoming less and less of a possibility. How the next few months are handled will be crucial in determining what independent wrestling will look like whenever this pandemic finally ends. □

ARENA REPORTS

We encourage promoters and readers to e-mail results to:

PWIResults@yahoo.com

Please try to utilize the exact format you see in the "Arena Reports." Also, please distinguish between handicap matches and three- or four-way matches. And, when reporting the result of a handicap match, indicate the number of competitors and who was the last man eliminated. Finally, please note pinfall finishes. Following these guidelines will help us greatly and make it more likely that your report will be used.

SPOTLIGHT CARD OF THE MONTH

INDIANA

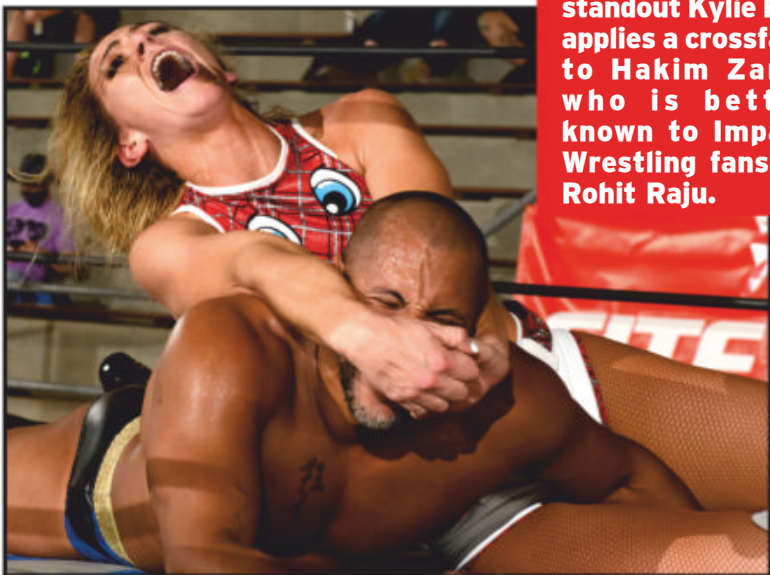
CROWN POINT—Glory Pro Wrestling at Rds Gym: **Mike Outlaw** defeated **Lee Moriarty** ... **Ethan Page** & **Josh Alexander** beat **Alex Zayne** & **Blake Christian** ... Midwest Territory champion **Hakim Zane** defeated **Kylie Rae** ... IWTW Independent Wrestling champion **WARHORSE** beat **Zachary Wentz** ... **Jake Something** defeated **1 Called Manders** in a bullrope match ... **Blair Onyx** & **Elayna Black** defeated **Hyan** & **Laynie Luck** ... **Devon Monroe** beat **Stephen Wolf**, **Jody Threat**, and **Kody Lane** in a four-way ... **Air Wolf** & **Angel Dorado** beat **Allie Kat** & **Dan The Dad** and United Glory tag team champions **Danhausen** & **Effy** to win the title ... Crown of Glory champion **AJ Gray** defeated **ACH**. (10-10-20)

—Spotlight photos by Earl Gardner

CALIFORNIA

SILVERADO—Game Changer Wrestling at Oak Canyon Park: **AJ Gray** defeated **Joey Janela** ... **Chris Dickinson** beat **Adrian Quest** and **Danny Limelight** in a triple-threat ... **Sabu** beat **Matthew Justice** ... **Allie Kat** beat **Elayna Black** ... **KTB** defeated **Effy** ... **SHLAK** defeated **Atticus Cogar** ... **Rickey Shane Page** beat **Black Christian**. (10-17-20)

—Kevin McElvaney



Knockouts division standout Kylie Rae applies a crossface to Hakim Zane, who is better known to Impact Wrestling fans as Rohit Raju.

FLORIDA

ORLANDO—WWE Hell in a Cell at the Amway Center: 24/7 champion **R-Truth** pinned **Drew Gulak** ... Universal champion **Roman Reigns** beat **Jey Uso** in an I Quit/Hell in a Cell Match ... **Elias** defeated **Jeff Hardy** by DQ ... **The Miz** defeated **Otis** to win the Money in the Bank briefcase ... **Sasha Banks** defeated Smackdown Women's champion **Bayley** by submission to win the title ... U.S. champion **Bobby Lashley** beat **Slapjack** ... **Randy Orton** defeated WWE World champion **Drew McIntyre** to win the title. (10-25-20)

—Jason McVeigh



Zachary Wentz tries in vain to submit IWTW champ WARHORSE, who would ultimately retain his title in an 11-minute contest.

GEORGIA

AUGUSTA—Livewire Wrestling at American Legion Post 63: **Chris Solar** defeated **AWOL** ... **Antonio Morgan** beat **Buddy Calhoun** ... **Exotic Youth** defeated **JC Walker** and **Reality Check** in a triple-threat ... WWA4 Internet champion **Ash Taylor** defeated **Gaston** ... **Matt Odam**, **William Blackwell**, **Roma Miller**, & **Darkness** beat **Mason Brix**, **Karl Hager**, **James Houston**, & **Big Game James** ... **The Menagerie** defeated **Jordan Kingsley** & **El Hombre De Horseo** ... Amplified champion **Adrian Davis** defeated **Josh Magnum** ... **Stryknyn** defeated **Scott Mayson** ... **Matt Sells** defeated Livewire Wrestling champion **Jeremy Cruz** in a steel cage match to win the title. (10-24-2020)

—Billy Johnson

IDAHO

CALDWELL—Wrestle Club at Undisclosed Location: **Damien Black** defeated **James Grimm** by submission ... **Jay Crews** & **Ric Knight** defeated

Big John Henry & **Marcus Anderson** by pinfall ... **Rusty Livings** beat **Wrestle Club** heavyweight champion **Garibai** by pinfall in a non-title grudge match. (10-10-20)

—Brian Westcott

INDIANA

MADISON—Supreme Wrestling at the Supreme Arena: **Gaston LaRue** pinned **Brandon Espinosa** ... **Chris Colt** defeated **Lillie Lockhart** by DQ ... **Van Martigan** pinned **Dewey Brown** ... **Leon Elliot** defeated **Chuck McRoberts** by DQ ... **Josh Lewis** pinned **Douglass Matthews** ... **Billy Mattern** pinned Light Heavyweight champion **Jason Kincaid** to win the title ... **Chet Rippley** pinned **Angus Barnett**. (10-24-20)

—Jason Cohen

CROWN POINT—Paradigm Pro Wrestling at Rds Gym: **Suge D** beat **O'Shay Edwards** ... MidwestTerritory.com champion **Chase Holliday** defeated **Sonico** ... **Billie Starkz** won a nine-person scramble, last eliminating **Shawn Kemp** ... **Dominic Garrini** beat **Kevin Ku** in a UWF-I Rules Match ... **Mo Atlas** defeated **Erick Stevens** by KO in a UWF-I Rules Match ... Heavy Hitters champion **Bobby**



Two of the Midwestern indie scene's most colorful characters (Dan The Dad and Danhausen) vie for in-ring supremacy. Both these men are funny, but make no mistake—they can get things done between the ropes.

Beverly beat Alex Colon in a streetfight ... Six-man tag team champions Akira, John Wayne Murdoch, & Reed Bentley defeated Hardway Heeter, Juicy Jimmy, & Nolan Edward. (10-11-20)

—Kevin McElvaney

MAINE

ORONO—Limitless Wrestling at American Legion Post 84: Delmi Exo pinned Nick Stapp ... Brandino Davis pinned BA Tatum ... DangerKid pinned Dylan Nix ... Limitless Wrestling champion Anthony Greene pinned Ashley Vox to retain the title. (10/7/20)

—Randy Carver

MARYLAND

SECRET LOCATION—F1ght Club Pro at F1ght Island: Kaia McKenna defeated Jeremy Grimes and Saul Esparza in a triple-threat ... Joshua Wavra & Xavier Faraday defeated Eel O'Neal & Jordan Blade ... Christopher Andino & Vam Williams beat Mason Wells & Tony Macko ... O'Shay Edwards defeated KA Robinson ... Killian McMurphy defeated Savannah Evans ... 1CW Bulletproof champion Myles Millennium beat DK Meadows and Chase Holliday in a triple-threat ... Chocolate City champion Billy Dixon beat Kristian Robinson ... Pan-African World Diaspora Wrestling champion Trish Adora defeated Timmy Lou Retton. (10-7-20)

—Chris Kazama

MICHIGAN

DETROIT— Pro Wrestling All Stars at the Knights of Columbus Hall: Alex Van Zant pinned Backwoods Bam ... Daniel Wolf pinned The Mummy ... Sean Lawhorn

defeated Jheras Grey and Corey Kerr in a triple-threat ... Mollock defeated Trill Bill, Tyler Adams, and Devon Drake in a four-way ... Mitch Hewitt & The Guru defeated Mikey Mana & Cluckey ... Cruisercore champion Mysterioius Movado pinned Ric Caurdiea ... Percy Drews pinned Tanner Nix ... Junior champion TJ Meyer pinned Jimi Grey ... The Souttaker wrestled LJ Lawrence to a no-contest ... Atlas Hytower, Chuck Stein, Money, J-Sinn, & El Toro defeated Steve Rivera, Peter B. Beautiful, Alex Van Zant, Isiah Frazier, & Mikey Baker. (10-25-20)

—Leonard Brand

NEW JERSEY

WILLIAMSTOWN—H2O Wrestling at H2O Wrestling Center: Bill Carr & Dan Barry defeated Matt Tremont &

Effy in a no-holds-barred match ... Frankie Pickard beat Deklan Grant ... Stan Stylez defeated Blackwater ... Sean Henderson beat Xavier Cross ... Chris Bradley & Kristian Ross beat GG Everson & Ryan Redfield ... Austin Luke defeated DylN McKay & Marcus Mathers in a triple-threat. (10-24-20)

—Andrew Coppola

WRIGHTSTOWN—United Wrestling Coalition at Kelly's Banquet Hall: Charlie Bonifer, The Gargantuan, & Kyle Payne defeated Warhead, The Orphan, & Dom Truex ... Flash Carter pinned Adonis Valerio ... Joey Angelo & Tony Chini defeated Mike Swanson & Joe Wolf ... Lost Boy Kirby pinned Nate Mustang ... Iron Bull Argus pinned U.S. champion Lance Scaper to win the title ... Hobo Harry defeated Handsome Hank in a retirement match ... Biggie Biggs pinned Oliver Bailey. (10-24-20)

—Joseph Grana

TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE—Impact Wrestling Bound for Glory at Skyway Studios: X division champion Rohit Raju won a six-person scramble also featuring Chris Bey, Jordynne Grace, TJP, Trey, and Willie Mack ... Rhino won the Call Your Shot Guntlet, last eliminating Sami Callihan ... Moose beat EC3 ... Ken Shamrock defeated Eddie Edwards ... The North defeated Ace Austin & Madman Fulton, Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson, and tag

team champions Alex Shelley & Chris Sabin to win the title ... Su Yung defeated Knockouts champion Deonna Purrazzo to win the title ... Rich Swann defeated heavyweight champion Eric Young to win the title. (10-24-20)

—Jason McVeigh

WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON—IWA East Coast at the Appalachian Power Park: Smokey C won the Unholy Battle Royal for a title opportunity ... Pat the Bruiser & Crosshairs Kelly defeated tag team champions Christian Kobain & Crash Jaxon by DQ ... Sam Adonis pinned Chance Prophet ... Timmy Lou Retton & White Mike defeated Chance Rizer & James Ryan ... Ray Lyn pinned Queen Aminata ... IWA East Coast champion Matt Conard pinned Shane Kryzak ... Juventud Guerrera defeated Jason Gory, Espiritu Maya, & Jake Crist in a four-way. (10-10-2020)

—Phillip Stamper

WISCONSIN

MILWAUKEE—Zelo Pro at Turner Hall: Missa Kate defeated Skye Blue, Annie Apples, and Sierra ... Davey Bang & August Matthews beat Doc Simmons & Zach Hendrix ... Trevor Outlaw defeated Jacob Dean ... Big Jon Crowley defeated Darrius Latrell ... Bryce Benjamin beat Mojo McQueen ... Matt Rehwoldt, Mason Conrad, & CJ Esparza defeated Brubaker, Jason Hades, & Storm Grayson ... Women's champion Laynie Luck beat Alex Gracia in a best-of-three falls match. (10-17-20)

—Zelo Pro

Intent on claiming his opponent's title, ACH tries a double-stomp on Crown of Glory champion AJ Gray. After a hard-fought bout, Gray walked away with the belt in his possession.



THE WAY IT WAS

BY BRIAN SOLOMON

THOSE WHOSE MEMORIES stretch back far enough may remember a time when tag team wrestling was referred to as “Australian Rules,” due to the commonly held belief that that’s where it originated (file that under all those tournaments in Rio de Janeiro...). So, it feels somehow appropriate that, even though they didn’t themselves originate the term “Australian Rules,” the two men who really and truly popularized tag team wrestling were Australian.

To be sure, tag team wrestling existed before the Fabulous Kangaroos first stepped into a wrestling ring together in 1957. The earliest record of a tag team match is from 1901, and there are records of tag team championships as far back as 1939. But what the Fabulous Kangaroos did was establish the concept of the “packaged team,” made up of two tag team specialists who wrestled exclusively with each other and had a shared gimmick. Before the Kangaroos, the vast majority of tag teams were simply two singles wrestlers thrown together for a little while, usually long enough to hold a title, or teams of brothers (real or otherwise) like Ben & Mike Sharpe, Ernie & Emil Dusek, George & Bobby Becker, George & Sandy Scott, and Bill & Dan Miller.

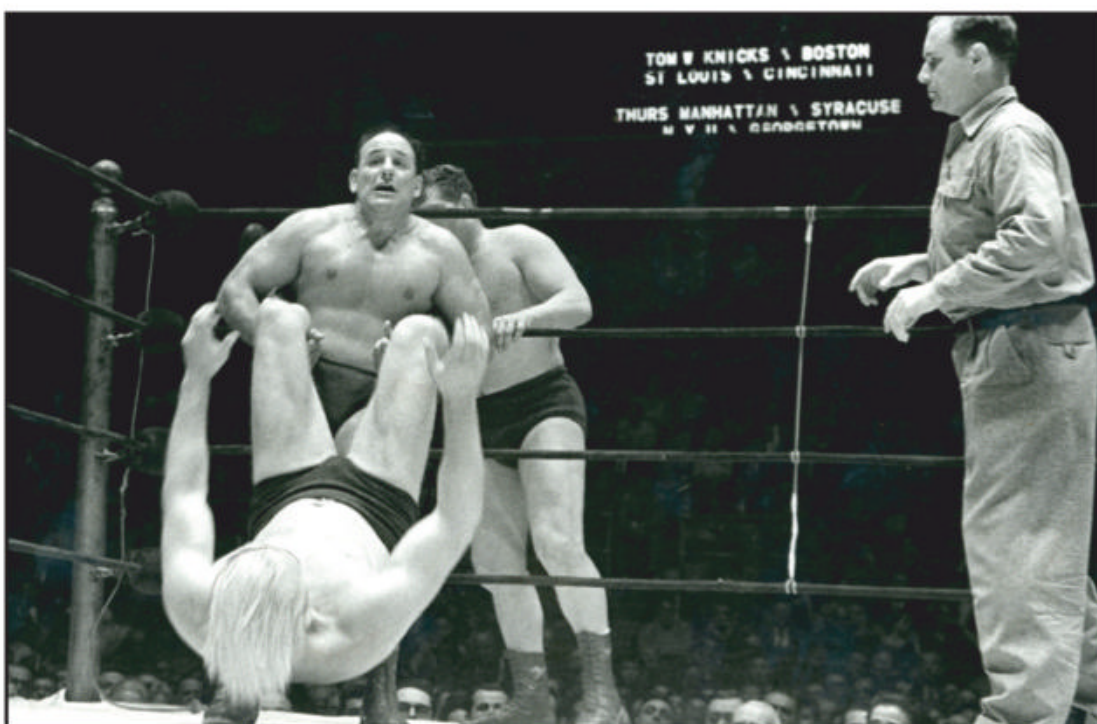
But the Fabulous Kangaroos were the first of their kind: a proper tag team act. The brainchild of Italian-Australian Al Costello, the original teaming was facilitated

by fellow wrestler/future promoter Joe Blanchard (Tessa’s grandpa), who happened to be good friends with another Australian grappler, Roy Heffernan. Costello had the idea of creating what he called an “Ultra-Australian” team, whose national identity would both define them and be used as a major heel

heat magnet with North American audiences. Donning bush hats of the kind worn by hunters in the Australian outback, and carrying giant boomerangs to the ring (they even tossed cardboard ones into the crowd for added effect), they played up their heritage in interviews, and used bold cheating tactics to draw



The original Fabulous Kangaroos (Roy Heffernan & Al Costello) pose with manager Wild Red Berry. The rulebreaking duo were hated by fans but beloved by promoters, who appreciated their uncanny ability to draw massive crowds.



At Madison Square Garden in March 1961, the Kangaroos battle a struggling Johnny Valentine.

the ire of the crowd. Completing the package was their know-it-all mouthpiece, former standout junior heavyweight champion Wild Red Berry, who himself helped to define the role of the wrestling manager just as they were defining the role of the tag team.

After being unleashed in Stu Hart's Stampede Wrestling out of Calgary, they began an eight-year tour of North America and Japan, with promoters everywhere clamoring for the heelish tandem that had become the talk of the business. Their outrageous disregard for the rulebook drew white-hot rage from fans, sometimes to the point of riots—one Madison Square Garden encounter with fellow mega-team Antonino Rocca & Miguel Perez had to be stopped when fans started throwing rocks at Costello & Heffernan, as Garden officials blared "The Star-Spangled Banner" over the P.A. in the hopes of calming the agitated spectators.

Like the Dudleys in a later era, the Kangaroos boasted championship wins everywhere they went, with 19 major titles in ten different major territories to their credit, including five world tag team titles. While competing in the Northeast for the

Capitol Wrestling Corporation (today known as WWE), they held the United States tag team title on three occasions, including a 14-month reign that remained the longest tag team title reign in company history until Demolition broke the record in 1989. To this day, they are still in third place all-time in WWE history, behind only Demolition and New Day. They even held the International tag team title in Rikidozan's Japan Pro Wrestling Alliance, being billed as the first champions on arrival and holding the title for close to three years (the Kangaroos' reputation was so strong that they would often be brought into a company as tag team champs, in order to give a new title instant legitimacy).

After a highly successful run in Vancouver that yielded four Canadian tag team titles, The Fabulous Kangaroos split up in 1965 after Heffernan, who had been on the road for 12 years and missed his homeland, packed up and moved back to Australia permanently. But that wasn't quite the end of the story, as Costello was not ready to give up on his concept. For over a dozen years after the breakup, he kept the Kangaroos name alive by choosing several different partners

to form new versions of the team—a strategy later employed by such tandems as the Fabulous Freebirds, Midnight Express, Legion of Doom, and many others. These partners included Ray St. Clair and Tony Charles, but the most successful was "Bulldog" Don Kent, a tough-as-nails Indiana native who pretended to be Australian for the sake of the team. Along with manager George "Crybaby" Cannon, Costello and Kent competed extensively in Detroit's Big Time Wrestling—memorably battling Ben Justice and The Stomper for the NWA World tag team title—and held seven world titles of their own, including runs in Japan and Puerto Rico's World Wrestling Council.

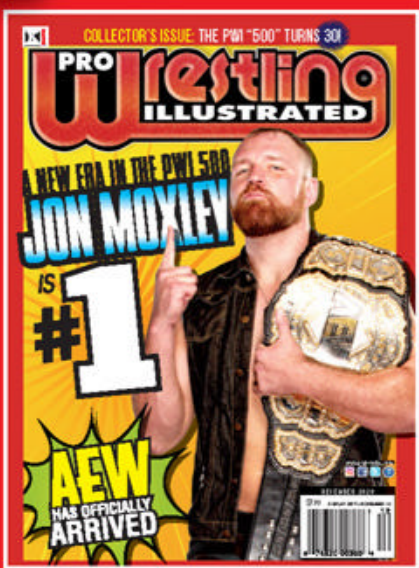
During the 1980s and into the early-1990s, Costello focused on managing, putting together new versions of the Fabulous Kangaroos that included people like "Irish" Mickey Doyle and even future WWF superstar Al Snow. Costello even briefly donned the bush hat once again in the mid '80s, teaming with Doyle on the Midwest independent circuit while in his 60s.

The Fabulous Kangaroos were more than just a tag team—they were a dynasty. For more than three decades, there was one version or another out there causing havoc, but it was the classic tandem of Al Costello and Roy Heffernan that will always be remembered as the definitive version of pro wrestling's original tag team attraction. It's because of the Kangaroos that fans have come to expect that tag teams be more than simply two random singles wrestlers, and virtually every major team that's come after—especially heel teams—have followed the standard they set, to one degree or another. We may not call it "Australian Rules" anymore, but we still owe a debt of gratitude to the Australians who put tag team wrestling on the map. □

BETWEEN FALLS

SEND LETTERS TO:
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PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns.



PWI "500"

Without fail, our annual *PWI "500"* issue is the most discussed magazine we put out all year. This year's list—the 30th edition—was no exception. In addition to being discussed on *AEW Dynamite*, the "500" generated quite a buzz on social media (and elsewhere).

"#337," tweeted Darius Carter, who ranked this year for the first time. "A dream realized. And this is only the beginning."

"Say what you want about the #PWI500," wrote O'Shay Edwards, another debut on this year's list (#351). "But I earned this and will continue to earn this."

"A lifelong goal finally happened," Cabana Man Dan (#417) tweeted. "I legit yell-cursed accidentally at the dinner table. Sorry fam."

While many wrestlers were thrilled to be included, not everyone was pleased with their position. Adam Cole took to Twitter to express his surprise. "#2 huh? Alright ... cya soon 2021. #AdamColeBayBay #1"

After finding out on *Dynamite* that he'd been outranked by Jon Moxley, Chris Jericho had some words for our Editor-in-Chief: "Kevin McElvaney is a moron!" Touché, Chris.

FAREWELL, STU SAKS!

I've just received my copy of the August *PWI* and see that Stu Saks retired on 5th June. I'd like to thank Stu for all his work and commitment to *PWI* over the years. I started reading in 1987—the "Supercards '87" issue; bring back the Supercards issue—so Stu's leaving marks the end of the *PWI* originals for me (unless you count Liz Hunter and Matt Brock of course!). The only active wrestlers that spring to mind since then are The Rock 'n' Roll Express, although I could be wrong. I haven't given it a great deal of thought.

I wish Stu all the best in retirement, and I hope the magazine stays relevant under new editorship and doesn't change too much (if at all). I hope there will always be a place for

magazines in the internet era. The internet cannot replace the time capsule that a magazine becomes, and as so many of us spend time staring at screens these days, it's a pleasure to get lost in the good quality journalism of a print magazine without the other distractions that the internet brings. Keep up the good work, all.

ROB LORD
Torquay, England

During the mid-1980s, I became a die-hard fan of pro wrestling. Part of my enjoyment in following the sport was *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* and its sister magazines. Names such as Peter King, Bill Apter, Dave Rosenbaum, Eddie Ellner, Craig Peters, and the great Matt Brock were must-reads for me each month.



Stu Saks presents our annual Stanley Weston Award to Ric Flair in 2008. Chris Bridges hopes Saks and Weston will soon join Flair and *PWI* alum Bill Apter in the Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame.

PHOTO BY DARLENE SAKS

Perhaps my favorite of these talented journalists, however, was Stu Saks. His insight into the sport was something I always appreciated and looked forward to reading. His column in *Inside Wrestling* following the so-called 20/20 “expose” is still the best pro wrestling column I have read.

Year after year, Stu was there. When other longtime writers moved on to other ventures, Stu remained. When the company was sold and moved from New York to Pennsylvania, Stu made the move.

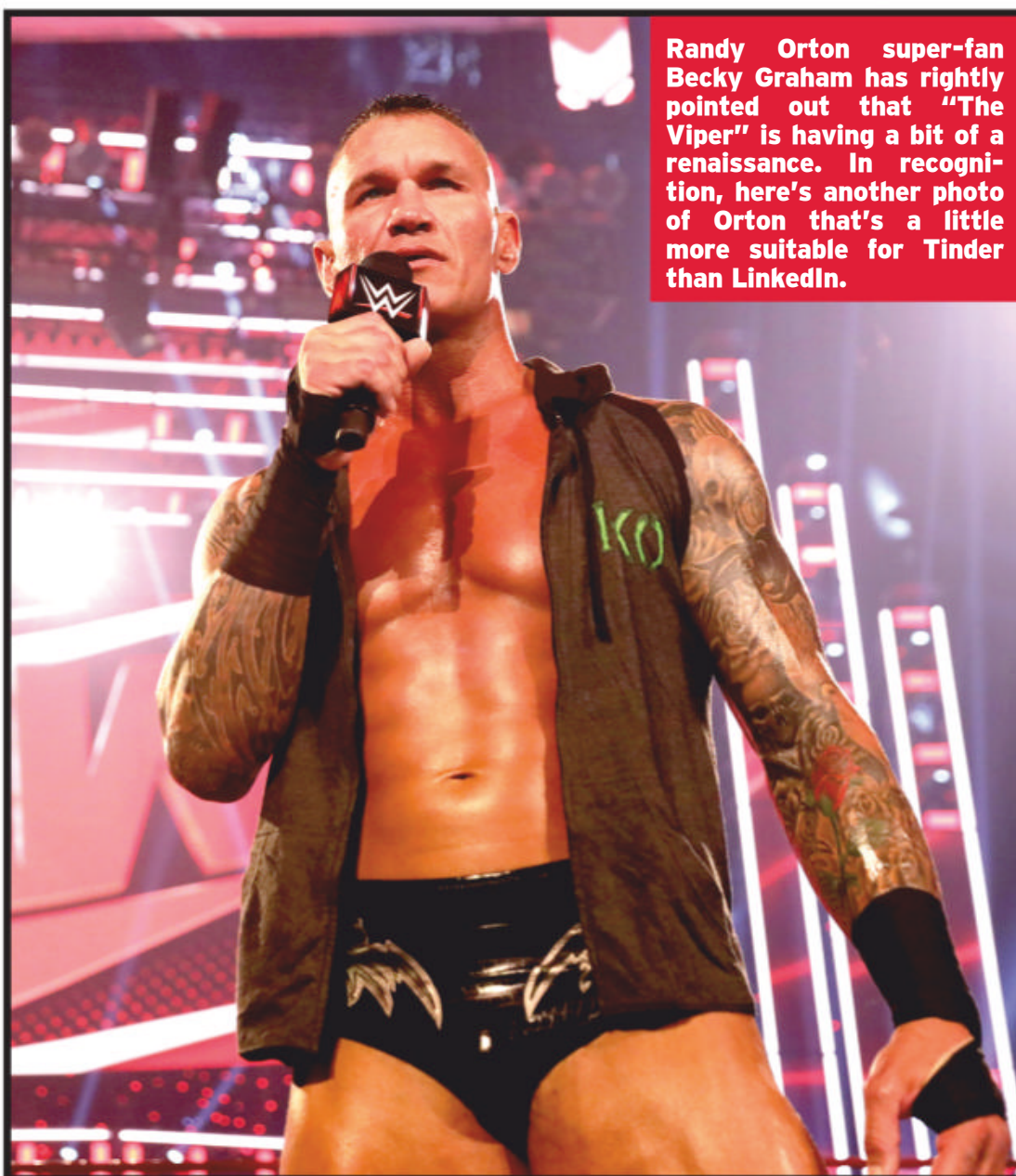
I know there were many times during his four decades at *PWI* that he literally held the magazine together and kept it alive. While I am happy for Stu in retirement, it won’t be the same without him.

Thanks for publishing his in-depth farewell column along with some of his favorite pics from the *PWI* years. I’m hoping he will be strongly considered for the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame. He, along with *PWI* founder Stanley Weston, belong as members and hopefully will join Bill Apter as a member soon.

CHRIS BRIDGES
Winder, GA

Just wanted to wish Mr. Saks a happy retirement. I’ve been a lifelong reader, subscriber, and even contributor to what was, at that time, the family of magazines that you guys have so masterfully created. I have loved every article, every interview, and, from Eddie Ellner and Dan Shocket to Dan Murphy and Harry Burkett, I spent so many Saturdays reading these magazines and waiting for wrestling to come on TV. Saks has done an awesome job and he will be sorely missed. Thank you to everyone at *PWI* for all these years of excellence.

JIMMY NANCE
Asheboro, NC



Randy Orton super-fan Becky Graham has rightly pointed out that “The Viper” is having a bit of a renaissance. In recognition, here’s another photo of Orton that’s a little more suitable for Tinder than LinkedIn.

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SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Nowadays, it seems like the generational gap amongst fans has created rules on what each fan is “suposed to like.” I think there are older fans like myself that maybe do not read *PWI* anymore because they don’t enjoy the newer wrestling/sports entertainment product. One thing I do know is that with *PWI*, there is something for EVERY kind of fan. Obviously, the new stuff is featured, but there is plenty to love for old schoolers. Focusing only on the August 2020 issue, Stu Saks’ final “From The Desk Of ...,” “Top 10 Career Highlights,” and the included pictures was GOLD for a fan like myself. Not to mention great columns like “Win Lose or Draw” by Harry Burkett that looked at what role wrestling has taken in the past after world-changing events. Or the story on Jacob Fatu (also by Harry Burkett) that further

demonstrates that wrestling is forever connected throughout the generations. In other words, *PWI* strives to embrace all tastes and unite all fans. The past isn’t ignored, but the future is where we’re all heading. I’m just happy to go along for the ride!

JAVIER OJST
El Salvador

A LITTLE MORE ORTON

Got the *PWI* “500” in mail today. Loved it, but no Randy Orton pix? C’mon. Will there be any in the next issue? Maybe an article on how he’s had a career resurgence and push and is doing great? Keep up the great work!

BECKY GRAHAM
Columbus, OH

[Okay, Becky, you’ve convinced us. We’ll run another photo of Randy in “Between Falls” ... this time! –Kevin McElvaney] □

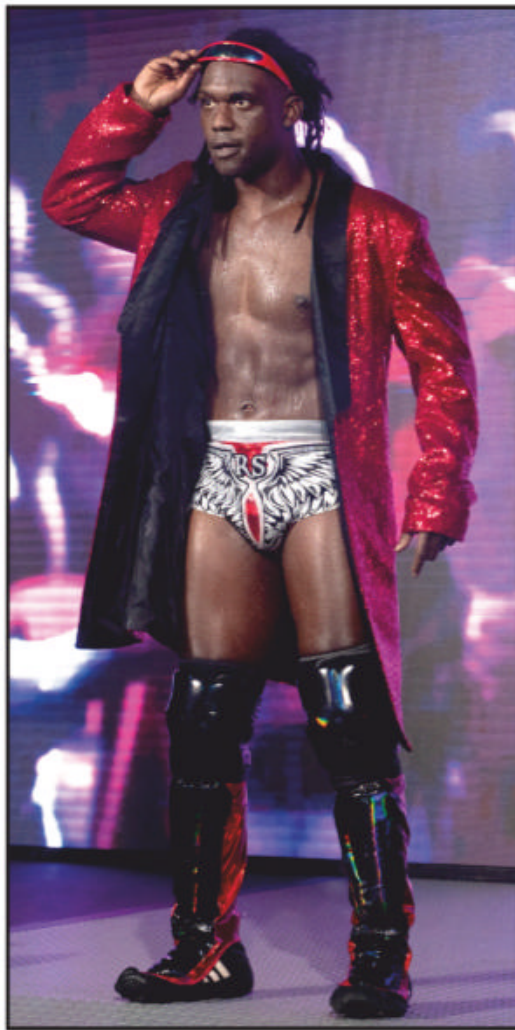
PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED
OCTOBER 30, 2020

HEAVYWEIGHT

- 1 JON MOXLEY**
224, Cincinnati, OH
(1) AEW World champion
- 2 TETSUYA NAITO**
225, Tokyo, Japan
(3) IWGP World/Intercontinental champion
- 3 ROMAN REIGNS**
265, Pensacola, FL
(4) WWE Universal champion
- 4 RANDY ORTON**
250, St. Louis, MO
(-) WWE heavyweight champion
- 5 FINN BALOR**
190, Bray, Ireland
(5) NXT heavyweight champion
- 6 DREW MCINTYRE**
265, Ayr, Scotland
(2) #1 contender WWE title
- 7 RICH SWANN**
200, Baltimore, MD
(-) Impact heavyweight champion
- 8 EITA**
159, Nagano, Japan
(8) Dragon Gate champion
- 9 CODY RHODES**
220, Atlanta, GA
(-) AEW TNT champion
- 10 BOBBY LASHLEY**
273, Junction City, KS
(10) WWE U.S. champion

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RICH SWANN

WOMEN

- 1 SASHA BANKS**
(6) 115, Fairfield, CA
Smackdown Women's champion
- 2 ASUKA**
(2) 137, Osaka, Japan
Raw Women's champion
- 3 BAYLEY**
(1) 119, San Jose, CA
#1 contender Smackdown Women's title
- 4 IO SHIRAI**
(3) 119, Kanagawa, Japan
NXT Women's champion
- 5 HIKARU SHIDA**
(4) 126, Kanagawa, Japan
AEW Women's champion
- 6 SERENA DEEB**
(-) 130, Fairfax, VA
NWA Women's champion
- 7 THUNDER ROSA**
(5) 132, Tijuana, Mexico
#1 contender NWA Women's title
- 8 MAYU IWATANI**
(-) 115, Yamaguchi, Japan
World of Stardom champion
- 9 SU YUNG**
(-) 140, Seattle, WA
Knockouts champion
- 10 DEONNA PURRAZZO**
(7) 112, Livingston, NJ
#1 contender Knockouts title

WWE RAW

WWE Champion:

- RANDY ORTON**
(2) 250, St. Louis, MO
- 1—DREW MCINTYRE**
(C) 265, Ayr, Scotland
 - 2—BOBBY LASHLEY**
(1) 273, Colorado Springs, CO
 - 3—MUSTAFA ALI**
(-) 187, Chicago, IL
 - 4—KEITH LEE**
(4) 340, Wichita Falls, TX
 - 5—ALEISTER BLACK**
(5) 215, Amsterdam, Holland
 - 6—AJ STYLES**
(-) 218, Gainesville, GA
 - 7—BRAUN STROWMAN**
(-) 386, Sherrills Ford, NC
 - 8—KEVIN OWENS**
(7) 266, Marietta, GA
 - 9—CEDRIC ALEXANDER**
(9) 205, Charlotte, NC
 - 10—SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(10) 248, Orangeburg, SC

SMACKDOWN

Universal Champion:

- ROMAN REIGNS**
(C) 265, Pensacola, FL
- 1—SAMI ZAYN**
(2) 212, Montreal, QC
 - 2—JEY USO**
(6) 227, San Francisco, CA
 - 3—BRAY WYATT**
(1) 286, Brooksville, FL
 - 4—BIG E**
(7) 285, Tampa, FL
 - 5—SETH ROLLINS**
(-) 217, Davenport, IA
 - 6—OTIS**
(4) 311, Duluth, MN
 - 7—SHEAMUS**
(8) 267, Dublin, Ireland
 - 8—LARS SULLIVAN**
(-) 330, Westminster, CO
 - 9—CESARO**
(9) 232, Lucerne, Switzerland
 - 10—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA**
(10) 229, Kyoto, Japan

AEW

World Heavyweight Champion:

- JON MOXLEY**
(C) 224, Cincinnati, OH
- 1—CODY RHODES**
(9) 220, Atlanta, GA
 - 2—EDDIE KINGSTON**
(5) 240, Yonkers, NY
 - 3—BRODIE LEE**
(1) 275, Rochester, NY
 - 4—LANCE ARCHER**
(2) 265, Gause, TX
 - 5—MJF**
(3) 216, Plainville, NY
 - 6—ORANGE CASSIDY**
(4) 180, Stewartville, NJ
 - 7—CHRIS JERICHO**
(6) 227, Winnipeg, MB
 - 8—KENNY OMEGA**
(10) 229, Winnipeg, MB
 - 9—ADAM PAGE**
(8) 228, Aaron's Creek, VA
 - 10—FENIX**
(-) 185, Mexico City, Mexico

IMPACT

Heavyweight Champion:

- RICH SWANN**
(3) 200, Baltimore, MD
- 1—ROHIT RAJU**
(1) 172, Saginaw, MI
 - 2—ERIC YOUNG**
(C) 232, Nashville, TN
 - 3—MOOSE**
(2) 295, Atlanta, GA
 - 4—TREY MIGUEL**
(4) 172, Toledo, OH
 - 5—CHRIS BEY**
(5) 180, Alexandria, VA
 - 6—KEN SHAMROCK**
(-) 243, Reno, NV
 - 7—WILLIE MACK**
(7) 280, Los Angeles, CA
 - 8—SAMI CALLIHAN**
(8) 207, Bellefontaine, OH
 - 9—EDDIE EDWARDS**
(-) 214, Boston, MA
 - 10—JORDYNNE GRACE**
(-) 160, Austin, TX

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or tag team. These ratings are compiled by a committee consisting of Kevin McElvaney, Pat Laprade, Kris Zellner, Louie Dee, Harry Burkett, and STRIGGA (cagematch.net, purolove.com). The numbers in parenthesis indicate a wrestler's position in that category last issue. If you're a promoter wishing to make a submission to the agate-sized ratings, email us at pwireresults@yahoo.com (please put the word "ratings" in the subject line).

TAG TEAMS

- 1

DAX HARWOOD & CASH WHEELER
Combined Weight: 446 pounds
(2) AEW World tag team champions
- 2

MONTEZ FORD & ANGELO DAWKINS
Combined weight: 492 pounds
(1) Smackdown tag team champions
- 3

ETHAN PAGE & JOSH ALEXANDER
Combined weight: 450 pounds
(-) Impact Wrestling tag team champions
- 4

KOFI KINGSTON & XAVIER WOODS
Combined weight: 417 pounds
(-) Raw tag team champions
- 5

ZACK SABRE JR. & TAICHI
Combined weight: 428 pounds
(5) IWGP World tag team champions
- 6

NIA JAX & SHAYNA BASZLER
Combined weight: 422 pounds
(6) WWE Women's tag team champions
- 7

DANNY BURCH & ONEY LORCAN
Combined weight: 380 pounds
(-) NXT tag team champions
- 8

SUWAMA & SHUJI ISHIKAWA
Combined weight: 552 pounds
(8) All Japan tag team champions
- 9

CHRIS SABIN & ALEX SHELLEY
Combined weight: 420 pounds
(3) #1 contenders Impact tag title
- 10

ASHLEY VOX & DELMI EXO
Combined weight: 275 pounds
(-) SHIMMER tag team champions

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: CHAMPION—Joey Ace; 1—Eric Martin; 2—Mike Law; 3—Sam Shields; 4—Mr. Ooh La-La; 5—Greg Spitz; 6—Teddy Fine; 7—Jay D. Luscious; 8—Chris Rockwell; 9—A Very Good Professional Wrestler; 10—Travis Lee

FIGHT CLUB PRO WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Trish Adora; 1—Billy Dixon; 2—O'Shay Edwards; 3—Mr. Grim; 4—Killian McMurphy; 5—Darius Lockhart; 6—Christopher Andino; 7—Kristian Robinson; 8—Ashton Starr; 9—DK Meadows; 10—Eel O'Neal

MAJOR LEAGUE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Jacob Fatu; 1—Alexander Hammerstone; 2—Davey Boy Smith Jr.; 3—Myron Reed; 4—Brian Pillman Jr.; 5—Tom Lawlor; 6— Richard Holliday; 7—King Mo; 8—Mance Warner; 9—Low Ki; 10—Dominic Garrini

MEXICO: 1—Volador Jr.; 2—Felino; 3—Gran Guerrero; 4—El Bandido; 5—Dr. Wagner Jr.; 6—Dragon Bane; 7—El Bandido; 8—Soberano Jr.; 9—Flyer; 10—Tiger

NXT U.K.: CHAMPION—WALTER; 1—Ilja Dragunov; 2— Noam Dar; 3—Trent Seven; 4—Dave Mastiff; 5—A-Kid; 6—Jordan Devlin; 7—Eddie Dennis; 8—Alexander Wolfe; 9—Joseph Conners; 10—Kenny Williams

PRO WRESTLING NOAH: CHAMPION—Go Shiozaki; 1—Katsuhiko Nakajima; 2—Kaito Kiyomiya; 3—Takashi Sugiura; 4—Kenoh; 5—Masaaki Mochizuki; 6—Kotaro Suzuki; 7—Naomichi Marufuji; 8—Kazushi Sakuraba; 9—Haoh; 10—Atsushi Kotoge

REAL CANADIAN WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Steve Rivers; 1—Heavy Metal; 2—KB6; 3—Vince Austin; 4—Slammer; 5—Steve Wilde; 6—Nate Nixon; 7—Dwight D. Davis; 8—Shaun Martens; 9—KOTA; 10—Matt Hart

SUPREME WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Angus Barnett 1—Josh Lewis; 2—Billy Mattern; 3—Nic Noble; 4—Kash Jackson; 4—Roger Malcolm; 5—Eric Draven; 6—Chet Rippley; 7—Jason Kincaid; 8—Chris Colt; 9—Chuck McRoberts; 10—Roger Malcolm

UNITED WRESTLING COALITION: CHAMPION—Biggie Biggs; 1—Iron Bull Argus; 2—Lance Scaper; 3—Kyle Payne; 4—Oliver Bailey; 5—Mr. Spectrum; 6—Adonis Valerio; 7—Tony Chini; 8—Slayer; 9—Joe Wolf; 10—Flash Carter

ZELO PRO: CHAMPION—Laynie Luck; 1—Drama King Matt; 2—Bryce Benjamin; 3—CJ Esparza; 4—Mason Conrad; 5—Missa Kate; 6—Elayna Black; 7—Brubaker; 8—Storm Grayson; 9—Jason Hades; 10—Kylie Rae

ROH

Heavyweight Champion:
RUSH
(C) 225, Jalisco, Mexico
1—PCO
(1) 300, Montreal, QC
2—DRAGON LEE
(2) 165, Jalisco, Mexico
3—JONATHAN GRESHAM
(3) 161, Atlanta, GA
4—TRACY WILLIAMS
(9) 195, Brooklyn, NY
5—JAY LETHAL
(4) 225, Elizabeth, NJ
6—JOSH WOODS
(6) 233, Dallas, TX
7—FRED YEHI
(7) 207, Atlanta, GA
8—PJ BLACK
(10) 213, Cape Town
9—MATT SYDAL
(5) 185, St. Louis, MO
10—DAVID FINLAY
(8) 209, Atlanta, GA

NXT

Heavyweight Champion:
FINN BALOR
(C) 190, Bray, Ireland
1—JOHNNY GARGANO
(3) 199, Cleveland, OH
2—DAMIAN PRIEST
(1) 248, New York, NY
3—TOMMASO CIAMPA
(5) 201, Milwaukee, WI
4—ADAM COLE
(2) 210, Panama City, FL
5—KYLE O'REILLY
(9) 200, Delta, BC
6—SANTOS ESCOBAR
(6) 198, Mexico City, Mexico
7—KUSHIDA
(-) 187, Tokyo, Japan
8—DEXTER LUMIS
(-) 238, Jacksonville, FL
9—CAMERON GRIMES
(7) 220, Cameron, NC
10—TIMOTHY THATCHER
(8) 228, Sacramento, CA

NEW JAPAN

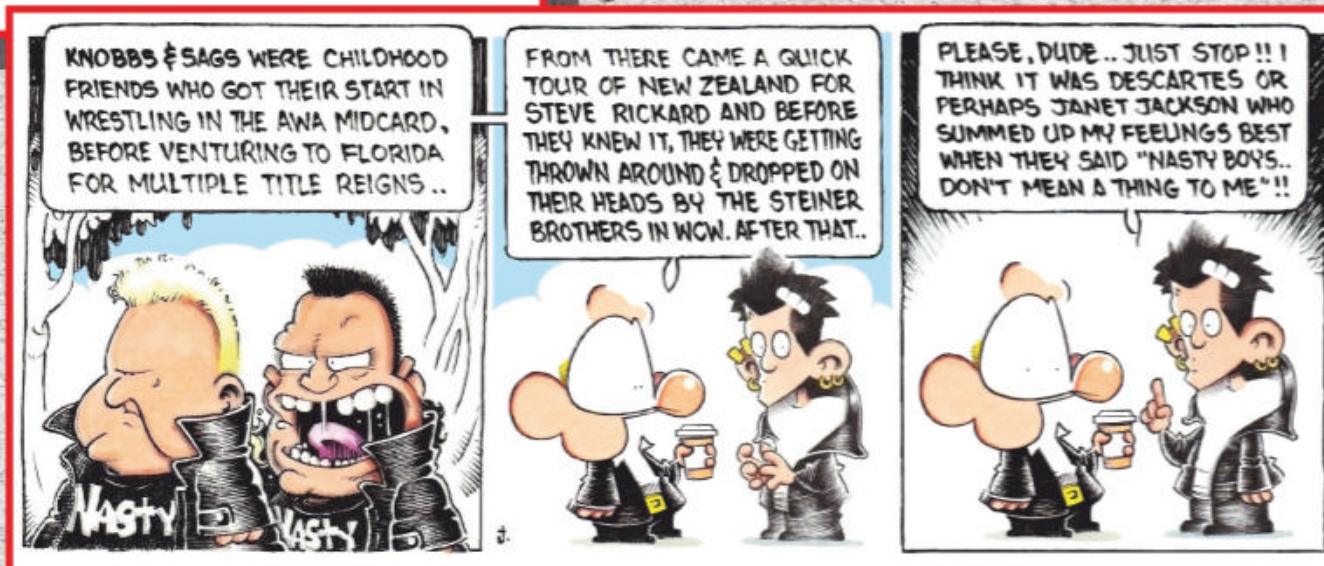
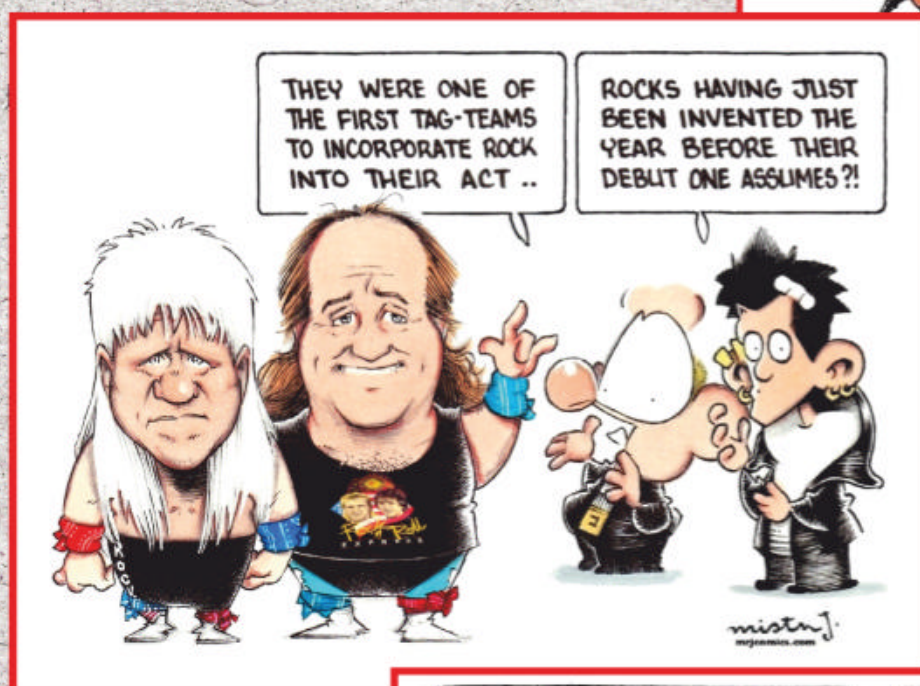
IWGP World Champion:
TETSUYA NAITO
(C) 225, Tokyo, Japan
1—KOTA IBUSHI
(8) 205, Kagoshima, Japan
2—SANADA
(-) 220, Niigata, Japan
3—EVIL
(1) 234, Mishima, Japan
4—KENTA
(-) 187, Saitama, Japan
5—WILL OSPREAY
(-) 231, Essex, England
6—KAZUCHIKA OKADA
(5) 236, Tokyo, Japan
7—TAIJI ISHIMORI
(3) 165, Tagajo, Japan
8—JAY WHITE
(-) 220, Auckland, NZ
9—SHINGO TAKAGI
(6) 212, Yamanashi, Japan
10—MINORU SUZUKI
(2) 225, Yokohama, Japan

GCW

Heavyweight Champion:
RICKEY SHANE PAGE
(C) 282, Lordstown, OH
1—ALEX COLON
(1) 189, Hammonton, NJ
2—CHRIS DICKINSON
(2) 235, Staten Island, NY
3—AJ GRAY
(4) 240, Lexington, TN
4—JOEY JANELA
(3) 183, Asbury Park, NJ
5—BLAKE CHRISTIAN
(6) 180, Missouri
6—ALLIE KAT
(7) 128, Austin, TX
7—LEE MORIARTY
(8) 185, Pittsburgh, PA
8—ACH
(5) 185, Austin, TX
9—KTB
(-) 273, Pine Barrens, NJ
10—TONY DEPPEN
(10) 165, Shamokin, PA

DRAWING BLOOD

BY JASON CONLAN



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